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## Encountering Others: Degeneration, Distortion, and Disability in Interwar German Visual Culture, 1918-1933

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theory and Criticism

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## Abstract

This thesis project examines the interrelationships of Weimar *Körperkultur* (“body culture”), interwar photographic practices broadly known as “*Neues Sehen*,” and Verist “*Neue Sachlichkeit*” painting to interrogate visual representations of bodily difference in Weimar media and art. Through close analysis of select case studies in Weimar film, photography, and painting, I argue that the lines between aesthetic, sociopolitical, and bodily deviance are blurred by many artists of the period. Such focus on the body as the site of an intermedial, interdisciplinary debate about aesthetic, social, political, and national “values” has historically been overlooked by scholars. I ultimately argue that certain “reactionary” figures (namely Franz Roh, Christian Schad, Otto Dix, and others associated with “mimetic” forms of interwar art) used non-normate embodiments to radically contest *Körperkultur* norms, the visual language of physiognomy, and the proto-Fascist eugenic legacies from which they emerged.

## Keywords

Body Culture, Degeneration, Disability, Social Hygiene, Eugenics, Visual Culture, Art History, Social Art History, Modernism, Weimar Republic, German Studies, Critical Disability Studies, Critical Theory, Film Studies, Weimar Photography, Neue Sachlichkeit, New Objectivity

## Summary for a Lay Audience

This thesis approaches German visual culture produced between World War I and World War II from the perspective of three different critical terms: **degeneration**, the concept that society as a whole “organism” becomes ill through the social deviance of criminals, disabled persons, and other socially undesirable bodies; **distortion**, a practice of image-making that does not intend to “realistically” represent its object but rather contort it and make it unrecognizable; and **disability**, the social construction of bodily difference in relation to a conventional “norm.” These three terms organize the analysis of film, photography, and painting, respectively, throughout the project. Through utilizing case studies of specific works from the period alongside relevant political thought, media theory, and cultural history, I hope to reveal the unique significance of the body (particularly bodies that deviate from the “norm”) in early twentieth-century German art, politics, and science. I subsequently argue that the non-normate body is not only central to these interdisciplinary discourses but that its specific position in interwar German culture has historically been overlooked in the relevant art-historical and theoretical scholarship. I believe that the study of this topic can help us better understand the foundations of “Third Reich” rhetoric and culture (1933-1945) and shed new light on the rich visual culture of the Weimar period (1918-1933).

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I would like to extend my deepest possible thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Janelle Blankenship, without whom this project would not have happened. It is, above all, indebted to her careful eye, unbridled enthusiasm, unending patience, and generous feedback. Working with Dr. Blankenship on this project has been a truly unparalleled experience for which I am unfathomably grateful. I reflect often on the extreme fortune I have had to such a skilled Germanist and media historian as my primary thesis supervisor. I know that working with Dr. Blankenship has not only taught me so much about being an academic but has also been precisely that which made my time at the Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism so valuable.

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to call my dear colleagues Deanna Aubert, Camilo Andrés Hoyos, and Alexandra Hudecki lifelong friends. The support, brilliance, and sheer warmth each of these fantastic thinkers has shown me will never be forgotten. They are undeniably responsible for making my time in London something to be cherished.

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## Introduction

The Weimar Republic is perhaps most significant in its radical failure. This “desperate and grudging experiment in democracy” and “laboratory for modernity”<sup>1</sup> lasted from the 1918 abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II following his loss of military support in the wake of World War I to Adolf Hitler’s 1933 rise to power (*Machtergreifung*). Equal parts struggle and resistance mark this tumultuous but culturally rich period: The Treaty of Versailles plunged Germany into major debt, consequently leading to hyperinflation, mass unemployment, and protests. Republicans tried to preserve the young democracy in the face of Imperialists who wished to reinstate the monarchy, while paramilitary groups like the *Freikorps* tried to suppress Communist efforts and overthrow the Republic in a series of failed coups. Though the new constitution sought to better represent its people, republic president Paul von Hindenburg bypassed checks and balances from roughly 1930 onward under rising National Socialist pressures. This culminated, for our purposes, in the Enabling Act of 1933 (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*). This act ceded authority to Hindenburg-appointed Chancellor Adolf Hitler and the *Nationalsozialistische deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), effectively ending the democratic republic.

The social and political autopsy of the Weimar republic undertaken in the last century has been thorough. Nonetheless, insufficient attention has been paid to the rise of normative visual culture that suffused daily life in the Republic with eugenic, proto-fascist aesthetic ideologies, particularly those pertaining to the body. This thesis attempts

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<sup>1</sup> *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xvii.

to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between the visual culture of the interwar period and the aesthetics and theories that would come to underpin Nazi biopolitics.

This project emerges from a longstanding interest in *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting and its complicated relationship to contemporaneous movements viewed as more political or avant-garde. *Neue Sachlichkeit* has been long described as a reactionary art that fed off the neoclassicism and subsequent *pittura metafisica*<sup>2</sup> emerging in 1920s Italy. But as with Picasso's so-called *retour a l'ordre*,<sup>3</sup> *Neue Sachlichkeit* works can only be considered "neoclassical" or "classicizing" in their figurative representations of bodies. They otherwise defy all classicizing tendencies in their rendering and often instead resonate more with proto-Surrealism, dadaism, and German Renaissance works: *Neue Sachlichkeit* painters "are observably the inheritors of German artistic tradition going back at least to Mathias Grünewald."<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, twentieth-century scholarship tends to identify *Neue Sachlichkeit* as part of a larger conservative trend in European art after World War I. Jost Hermand notably described *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a "resignation" from the revolutionary milieu,<sup>5</sup> and Benjamin Buchloh summarized *Neue Sachlichkeit* as follows: "the general tendencies of the German movement aimed for a 'return to order' in the arts, a renewed emphasis on the separation of categories, the transhistorical validity of skillful painterly

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<sup>2</sup> "Metaphysical painting" like that developed by Giorgio de Chirico is an important precursor to the figurative faction of the Surrealists.

<sup>3</sup> "Return to order" is often used to describe reactionary aesthetic conservatism following World War I.

<sup>4</sup> William Wilson, "ART REVIEW: Revisiting the Unthinkable: Nazi Germany's 'Degenerate Art' Show at LACMA," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Jost Hermand, "Unity within Diversity? The History of the Concept of *Neue Sachlichkeit*," trans. Peter and Margaret Lincoln, in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, edited by Keith Bullivant and Richard Hinton Thomas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 167.

execution and mimetic representation.”<sup>6</sup> While *Neue Sachlichkeit* is more figurative than its avant-garde contemporaries at the Bauhaus or at the centre of Berlin Dada, it remains artistically progressive in its rejection of the formal and philosophical idealism buoyed by interwar Germany’s political right. As I argue in the third chapter on *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting particularly, to conflate figuration with socio-political conservatism is certainly to give undue (and potentially anachronistic) weight to the abstract paradigm and ignores the complex visual representation and extreme historical nuance of the art of the period.

Art historian and critic Hal Foster identifies perceptions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as only pivoting in the last decade and largely attributes this to cultural historians like Devin Fore and a series of major recent exhibitions taking up Weimar art. Such exhibitions include the Tate Liverpool’s 2017 “Portraying a Nation: Germany 1919-1933,” which emphasized the work of Otto Dix and August Sander, and the Tate Modern’s 2018-2019 “Magical Realism: Art in Weimar Germany 1919-1933.” While such exhibitions shy away from the controversial term “*Neue Sachlichkeit*,” they remain representative of and focused on such works. Further exhibitions embracing the terminology include the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s 2015-2016 exhibition, “New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933,” and the 2004 Ubu Gallery exhibition “*Neue Sachlichkeit*: ‘New Objectivity’ in Weimar Germany 1919-1933.” The *Neue Galerie* in New York has also consistently exhibited *Neue Sachlichkeit* works, most recently in its 2019 show, “Eclipse of the Sun: Art of the Weimar Republic,” its 2018 show, “Before the Fall: German and Austrian Art of the 1930s,” the 2015 show, “Berlin Metropolis: 1918-1933” and the 2014 exhibit, “Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, “Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of Portraiture,” in *Formalism and Historicity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), footnote 4 on 68.

Art in Nazi Germany, 1937,” which featured many of the works parodied by the 1937 Nazi exhibition. It is likely that the 1991 reconstruction of the 1937 *Entartete Kunst* exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art also contributed to some renewed interest in *Neue Sachlichkeit* prior to LACMA’s 2015 exhibition.

Despite the revival of interest in *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its indeterminate position in modern German art, to date, no comprehensive studies have fully and sufficiently contextualized *Neue Sachlichkeit* within the conflicting visual cultures of the Weimar Republic. Driven by a desire to overturn critical dismissal of the movement as reactionary and conservative, I organized this thesis project around the role of the body in interwar art with particular emphasis on non-normate bodies. While recent scholarship has begun to account for the plurality and diversity of bodies historically occupying Germany – namely Carol Poore’s landmark text, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* – the disciplines of critical theory, art history, and visual culture studies more broadly have not yet sufficiently engaged with these complexities. This is assuredly a timely project as we continue to observe the Republic’s centennial.

The language used throughout the thesis reflects an investment in the practices of critical disability studies. I implement the language of “normate” to signal my indebtedness this field, particularly the work of scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson as well as Joel Michael Reynolds after her, among others. Garland-Thomson coins “normate” in her seminal book, *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997). The normate body (and subject) is something that is constructed, created, and assumed rather than “given.” While the “normate” possesses an important social character, it is made legible first and foremost by the physical body. As Garland-Thomson describes, the “normate” is, in

actuality, an incredibly stringent *ideal* into which most individual bodies do not (or cannot) fit. It is nonetheless potent, and its representation justifies the sustained oppression of and violence against bodies deemed deviant. I hope that this thesis pursues the objective laid out by Garland-Thomson's work:

Naming the figure of the normate is one conceptual strategy that will allow us to press our analyses beyond the simple dichotomies of male/female, white/black, straight/gay, or able-bodied/disabled so that we can examine the subtle interrelations among social identities that are anchored to physical differences.<sup>7</sup>

While it is of imminent importance to emphasize the fundamental un-reality of the normate position and the binary it instates, it is equally important to understand the mobilizing role of the normate ideal in all areas of representation and discourse. This thesis aims to concurrently study the normate and its “mutually constituting” figure of the disabled (or “non-normate”) body as they manifested across various interwar German media. To my mind, this is an urgent project: just as Garland-Thomson identifies feminist studies as constructing a specific “ghetto” for disability studies, so, too, has art history tended to cavalierly ignore the wide range of embodiments, perceptions, and phenomenologies that constitute key threads in the tapestry of its history. Disability and non-normate subjects have always been a part of art history – in efforts to separate “biography” from “art,” the disability of iconic artists like Frida Kahlo (who graces *Extraordinary Bodies*’ cover), Andy Warhol, Chuck Close, Yayoi Kusama, among countless others, is often overwritten by formalist approaches to their work. Such a practice of history degrades the contributions of lesser-known disabled artists while stigmatizing aesthetic “cripistemologies” more generally.

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<sup>7</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 8.

Indeed, disability is a “culturally fabricated narrative of the body” rather than any given ontological category or aberration. In “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” Garland-Thomson advocates for the holistic integration of critical disability studies into other critical methods due its ubiquity and omnipresence in any discourse of difference: “...the cultural function of the disabled figure is to act as a synecdoche for all forms that culture deems non-normative.”<sup>8</sup> As Garland-Thomson continues, it is *precisely* systems of representation like those at stake in the practice of art history that “legitimate” violence in the form of eugenics, genocide, and more.<sup>9</sup> As a discipline embedded within a larger project interrogating representation and its conditions, art history possesses the ethical imperative of continuing untangling the knots of representation, ideology, and discourse that efface, erase, and effectively destroy non-normate bodies.

Garland-Thomson’s critical oeuvre makes clear that disability and normativity are fluid, fluctuating constructs defined in relation to one another and the social-political conditions of a given society and time. In this introduction and thesis, I use degeneration, distortion, and disability as three deeply imbricated categories of representation and bodily manifestation to loosely organize Weimar visual culture that in myriad ways engages with non-normate embodiments by rejecting bodily ideals and normativity like those found in neoclassicizing art.

Neoclassicism *was* alive and well in Europe following the Great War: Ana Carden-Coyne has studied the function of classicism as an “aesthetics of healing” for

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<sup>8</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” *NWSA Journal* 14 no. 3 (2002): 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 9.

industrial warfare in Anglophone cultures in her 2009 book, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War*.<sup>10</sup> Her pioneering project demonstrates the direct parallels between cultural “reconstruction” through classical idylls and the cultural resonance of bodily mutilation and supplementation. Similarly, Suzannah Biernoff’s 2012 text, *Portraits of Violence: War and the Aesthetics of Disfigurement*, more broadly explores the significance of representing disfigurement in visual culture from the First World War to the present. Biernoff does this by drawing on the likes of Carden-Coyne and other cultural historians as well as through closely studying the works of surgeon and artist Henry Tonks and Anna Coleman Ladd (who, it should be noted, trained as a neoclassical sculptor in Paris and Rome and prior to making reconstructive facial prosthetics for WWI soldiers<sup>11</sup>).

With this in mind, a classicizing, salving aesthetic can easily be identified in the Weimar Republic as constituting and constructing a normative ideal. Whereas monarchs previously represented and incorporated the body politic, the interwar German body politic (and the rhetoric of National Socialism) depended in many ways on the existence of an apotheosized common subject, the elevated everyman. Interwar *Körperkultur* (literally the “cult of the body” or “body culture”) produced visual culture dedicated to the racially, nationally, and aesthetically ideal Aryan body as that which was active, muscular, and normative. This strain of neoclassical bodily idealism would later birth “Third Reich” sculptors like Arno Breker and Josef Thorak. Through *Körperkultur* and its re-articulation of degeneracy theory, the body and its boundaries uniquely came to

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<sup>10</sup> Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Caroline Alexander, “Faces of War,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 2007.



bear the responsibility of organizing and containing the nation's anxieties about its power, purity, and providence.

*Körperkultur* attempted to stave off fears of social, political, and physical degeneration felt in the interwar period while laying the foundations for Nazi eugenics and violence against non-normate bodies. *Körperkultur* also contributed to the long history of “scientific” racism and interventions into the bodies of others. To contextualize my thesis project and my first chapter on Weimar *Körperkultur*, I will discuss a truncated history of European degeneracy theory and briefly examine its subsequent effects on nineteenth-century race “science” and turn-of-the-century eugenic thought. While this discussion of “degeneracy” and its conceptualization in German thought is by no means comprehensive, it serves to elucidate the consistent connections between degenerate rhetoric to theories of bodily difference and, subsequently, racial and national aesthetics that in some way manage that bodily difference.

The term “degeneration” is first used in a social context in mid-nineteenth-century France in the work of Bénédict Morel, whose 1857 *Traité des Dégénérescences* (*Treatise on Degeneration*) drew parallels between what Morel diagnosed as the increase of social “deviations” and crime with the increase of disease, originating the concept of hereditary degeneracy and combining the (fallible) practices of psychiatry, criminology, and physiognomy.<sup>12</sup> Morel saw the social maladies of the French body politic embodied by its undesirables. This conflation of politics, social hygiene, and bodily aesthetics directly

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<sup>12</sup> “When under any kind of noxious influence an organism becomes debilitated, its successors will not resemble the healthy, normal type of the species, with capacities for development, but will form a new sub-species, which, like all others, possesses the capacity of transmitting to its offspring, in a continuously increasing degree, its peculiarities, these being morbid deviations from the normal form - gaps in development, malformations and infirmities...” Bénédict Morel, *Traité des Dégénérescences*, 1857. Excerpt reproduced and translated in Kelly Hurley, “Hereditary Taint and Social Contagion: The Social Etiology of *Fin-de-Siècle* Degeneration Theory,” *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 14 no. 2 (1990), 193.

influenced German texts such as Max Nordau's 1892 *Entartung* (*Degeneration*), Emil Kraepelin's 1908 "Zur Entartungsfrage" ("On the Question of Degeneration"), Oswald Spengler's 1923 second volume of *Das Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*), and Paul Schultze-Naumburg's *Kunst und Rasse* (*Art and Race*) in 1928, among others. A tradition of seeing the *Volk* as a specifically physical, living body or organism also emerges from this body of thought, as seen in Nordau's "superorganisms" of culture and Wilhelm Wundt's thinking of the *Volk* at large as "analogous to the human organism."<sup>13</sup> In key ways, turn-of-the-century German society and its values become quite literally and thoroughly "embodied" as normate.

A Zionist and critic of Austro-Hungarian origins who considered himself a naturalized German, Max Nordau originated the attack on "degenerate" *culture*. Nordau closely followed Morel's project but staged a critique of the individual, physical body over the social body:

Degeneracy betrays itself among men in certain physical characteristics, which are denominated 'stigmata,' or brand-marks—an unfortunate term derived from a false idea, as if degeneracy were necessarily the consequence of a fault, and the indication of it a punishment. Such stigmata consist of deformities, multiple and stunted growths in the first line of asymmetry, the unequal development of the two halves of the face and cranium; then imperfection in the development of the external ear...etc.<sup>14</sup>

Physiognomy and the madness Nordau associates with it are directly related to politics through Nordau's citation of the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso,<sup>15</sup> to whom Nordau's volume is dedicated. "Hereditary taints" identified by Lombroso in criminals

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<sup>13</sup> Egbert Klautke, *The Mind of the Nation: Völkerpsychologie in Germany 1855-1955* (New York: Berghahn), 2013, 66.

<sup>14</sup> Max Nordau, *Entartung*, *The Project Gutenberg EBook of Degeneration from the second edition of Degeneration* (London: Wilhelm Heinemann, 1898), 2016, 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> "[The anarchists] frequently have those characteristics of degeneracy which are common to criminals and lunatics, for they are anomalies, and bear hereditary taints." Cesare Lombroso, "La Physionomie des Anarchistes," *Nouvelle Revue* (May 15, 1897), 227, quoted in Nordau, *Entartung*, 22.

are precisely those that precipitated the development of German eugenics and a more complex institutional system of management for not only criminals, but also anyone whose body betrayed the presence of a supposed taint. Additionally, Nordau directly tethers degeneracy to visual perception through his critique of the then-contemporary avant-garde:

The curious style of certain recent painters—‘impressionists,’ ‘stipplers,’ or ‘mosaists,’ ‘papilloteurs’ or ‘quiverers,’ ‘roaring’ colourists, dyers in gray and faded tints—becomes at once intelligible to us if we keep in view the researches of the Charcot school into the visual derangements in degeneration and hysteria.... This is the natural history of the aesthetic schools. Under the influence of an obsession, a degenerate mind promulgates some doctrine or other—realism, pornography, mysticism, symbolism, diabolism. He does this with vehement penetrating eloquence, with eagerness and fiery heedlessness. Other degenerate, hysterical, neurasthenical minds flock around him, receive from his lips the new doctrine, and live thenceforth only to propagate it.<sup>16</sup>

Here, Nordau strikingly anticipates Hitler’s remarks 45 years later describing avant-garde artists as having “eye disease” in his speech for opening of 1937 “Great German Art Exhibition,” the anaesthetizing double of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition and its degenerate contents.<sup>17</sup> Nordau dedicates the rest of the book to exposing the “pathological character” of the aesthetic tendencies he sees as degenerate. Additionally, he anticipates the flourishing body culture that would arise following World War I by mapping out the manifestation of the German hysterical subject’s maladies in anti-Semitic behaviors and obsessive concerns about one’s own bodily health.<sup>18</sup>

Influences on projects such as Nordau’s can also be traced back to the development of *Völkerpsychologie* in nineteenth-century Germany by Wilhelm Wundt.

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<sup>16</sup> Nordau, *Entartung*, 27-31. For more on the Charcot school, see Figure 47 in chapter two.

<sup>17</sup> Plumb, “Continuity through ‘Inner Emigration,’” 259.

<sup>18</sup> Nordau’s critique additionally labeled interest in magic and mysticism as “irrational” and, subsequently, degenerate – itself perhaps significant with regards to Roh’s “magical realism,” which will be discussed in chapter three. Nordau, *Entartung*, 210.

Wundt's efforts to synthesize anthropology and psychology perhaps also popularized "empirically" studying the maladies of culture – especially through analogy<sup>19</sup> – even though many psychologists and other scientists disavowed Wundt's secondhand research methodology.<sup>20</sup> While Wundt did not achieve wide-held esteem in his time, the impact of his work on relevant thought from the early twentieth century is undeniable. Wundt's analogy between the individual and the group inspired phenomenologist and National Socialist sympathizer Martin Heidegger; Wundt's core concepts were further implemented by sociologist Émile Durkheim, and the "unresolved problems" in Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* were taken up by Sigmund Freud in 1913.<sup>21</sup>

Wundt metamorphosed his theories from the universal to the specific (and to the specifically German) in 1914 in order to wield his *Völkerpsychologie* as a weapon of nationalist propaganda during World War I. This entailed labeling the German nation as not merely a civilization (as which he refers England), but civilization's extension, its flourishing: a culture.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Wundt's arguments remained merely "radical nationalist" and not "biologically racist" till his death in 1920. His ideas only became "völkisch" and anti-Semitic when reinterpreted and appropriated by his son.<sup>23</sup> Despite this, Wundt's ideas did not gain traction in the Weimar Republic, and were instead criticized for their universalist tinge. "Race psychologists" like Hans F.K. Günther became immensely popular instead, though Günther's methodology based on secondary sources did not depart much from Wundt's. Wundt disciple Willy Hellpach officially revived the practice of *Völkerpsychologie* following the Nazi rise to power in 1933.

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<sup>19</sup> Klautke, *The Mind of the Nation*, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 72-79.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 82-85.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 88.

Hellpach's own research in the Weimar period worked to connect physiognomy and group psychology, thus tethering bodily aesthetics to the practice of *Völkerpsychologie*.<sup>24</sup> While Hellpach claimed general ambivalence to Nazi ideology, he conceded to NSDAP pressures by including the phrase "*Blut und Boden*" ("blood and soil") in his definition of the *Volk* in his 1938 book on *Völkerpsychologie*. He was later invited to contribute to SS Nazi think tank plans to "Germanize" Bohemia and Moravia based on the popularity of his earlier studies in the physiognomy of Germanic "tribes" with the think tank's founders.<sup>25</sup>

One of Wundt's most impactful protégés was Emil Kraepelin, a clinical psychologist and scientific racist who helped found the *Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie* (The German Institute for Psychiatric Research in Munich, also known as DFA and funded in large part by the Rockefeller Foundation<sup>26</sup>). Kraepelin contributed to the discourse around degeneracy in his 1908 "*Zur Entartungsfrage*" ("On the Question of Degeneration"), in which he also describes the need for further state-supported research on the psychiatric components of degeneracy. Kraepelin suggests that increased urbanism contributed to growing rates of insanity as well as the "lack of hygiene due to the poverty of the lower classes," implying an intrinsic class component to "degeneracy."<sup>27</sup> He repeated his concerns about degeneracy in a 1916 letter appealing for funds to help found the DFA.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Klautke, *The Mind of the Nation*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 122-130.

<sup>26</sup> Matthias Weber, "Psychiatric Research and Science Policy in Germany. The History of the *Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie* (German Institute for Psychiatric Research) in Munich from 1917 to 1945," *History of Psychiatry* xi (2000), 247.

<sup>27</sup> Emil Kraepelin, "*Zur Entartungsfrage*," *Zentralblatt für Nervenheilkunde und Psychiatrie*, 31 (1908) 745-51. Reproduced in *History of Psychiatry* 18 no. 3 (2007), 399-404.

<sup>28</sup> Weber, "Psychiatric Research and Science Policy in Germany," 240.

Kraepelin also supported the efforts of Ernst Rüdin, a eugenicist Kraepelin appointed to the DFA and who assumed its directorship in 1931. Thereafter, Rüdin actively worked directly with the National Socialist party, forging a partnership that resulted in the forced sterilization of hundreds of thousands of German mental patients.<sup>29</sup> Both Kraepelin and Rüdin were also proponents of Kraepelin's brother-in-law, Alfred Ploetz, who coined the term *Rassenhygiene* and was at the forefront of the German eugenics movement.

Oswald Spengler is not crucial for our purposes but remains noteworthy for his lasting impact on others regarding ideas of racial ownership. While Spengler did not overtly believe in scientific and bodily foundations for race, he argued for the importance of racial *Lebensraum* ("living space"), a concept that would find its direct expression in the Nazi dictum of *Blut und Boden*, in his two-volume *Decline of the West* (1918-1923).

An unlikely addition to the legacy of scientific racism in Germany, Paul Schultze-Naumburg went from an architectural critic and historian to a leading detractor of modern art as "degenerate." Schultze-Naumburg's 1928 *Kunst und Rasse* bolstered the era's right-wing view of modernism as a racial sickness by positioning works of modern art representing non-normative embodiments or otherwise depicted in a "degenerate" style opposite a page of photographs of physically disabled and deformed persons. This graphic design schema that Schultze-Naumburg borrows from Morel's diagnostic format would later be used in the catalogue to the 1937 Nazi *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in a direct citation of Schultze-Naumburg's work (see Figure 15).

In addition to these theories of degeneration, social hygiene, and racial health, there was an established nineteenth-century tradition of using Darwinism to justify anti-

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<sup>29</sup> Weber, "Psychiatric Research and Science Policy in Germany," 251.

Semitism and other forms of xenophobia and racism. Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain were notable prewar contributors to this body of thought, though neither focused particularly on the body. Despite the first stirrings of *Körperkultur* emerging in the late eighteenth century, its blossoming in the early twentieth century can be traced back to the elaborate rhetoric of degeneration outlined here coupled with the traumatic impact of World War I on the German collective psyche.

All of this is to say that Weimar German racial and bodily politics depend on a complex system (and “scientific” tradition) of analogies: of individual to group, of body to mind, of body to race, and of normativity to health, among others. Consequently, studying the role and representation of disability among these traditions entails taking up a political/relational model of disability.<sup>30</sup> A political/relational model understands disability as something that is culturally defined and constructed and, thus, an ever-changing assemblage. Disability is polysemous precisely because of this relationality. In an attempt to grapple with this polysemy, I “translate” the concept of “non-normate” embodiment in this thesis into three organizing terms that are all at once distinct and, in some ways, conventionally treated as semantically interchangeable: degeneration, distortion, and disability. These three concepts and their interrelations guide the analysis and structure of my chapters.

The first chapter, “Weimar *Körperkultur* and Its Disqualified Bodies,” surveys the far-reaching effects of *Körperkultur* ideology through close visual analysis of two major interwar films, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (1925) and *Nerven* (1919). These films

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<sup>30</sup> This model is pioneered by crip theorist Alison Kafer and was developed to counter the medical model of disability that focuses on the individual over the political construction of disability as it permeates both culture and medicine. Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 4-10.

manifest as overt and covert crystallizations of normate idealism, respectively, that demonstrate the process of disqualification due to their focus on diagnosing “degeneration” in their overarching narratives. My analysis considers the formal relationships of these films to the material culture of degeneracy theory and analyzes how each film “dialogues” with what would later be labeled “degenerate” art movements.

The second chapter, “Distortion and Didacticism in Interwar Photographic Portraits,” explores the interrelations of bodily deviance and distortion in interwar media theory, *Neues Sehen* photography, and the mode of the photographic portrait. This chapter further attends to three photobooks from the period – Helmar Lerski’s *Köpfe des Alltags*, Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold’s *Foto-Auge*, and August Sander’s *Antlitz der Zeit* – to explore the resonance of normate faciality and embodiment across intermedia aesthetic discourses.

The third chapter, “‘Re-producing’ and Representing Disability in Interwar German Painting: The Case of the Verists,” examines examples of *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting that transgress *Körperkultur* ideals through the figurative representation of bodily and racial others. I argue against critical oversimplifications of *Neue Sachlichkeit* by emphasizing the movement’s tendency to centralize politically peripheral – which is to say “degenerate” – persons and experiences.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, expanding on the second chapter’s discussion of medicalizing typologies as part of what Allan Sekula calls a

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<sup>31</sup> Much of the scholarship that presents *Neue Sachlichkeit* as reactionary and retrograde also ignores the labeling of many of its artists as “degenerate” following the Nazi rise to power. “Degenerate” artists whose works were seized in the late thirties that were affiliated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* include Max Beckmann, Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, Otto Dix, Conrad Felixmüller, George Grosz, Heinrich Hoerle, Carlo Mense, Otto Mueller, Anton Räderscheidt, Franz Radziwill (despite Nazi sympathies), Rudolf Schlichter, Georg Scholz, Georg Schrimpf, Ernst Thoms, Max Unold, Bruno Voigt, and others. Work by other artists influential to *Neue Sachlichkeit* including Giorgio de Chirico, Oskar Schlemmer (Bauhaus), Man Ray (dada), and Max Ernst (dada/Surrealism), were also seized. “*Entartete Kunst*,” typescript inventory prepared by the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* 1941-42. Digitized by the Victoria & Albert Museum, 2014. Accessed June 10-29, 2019.



“shadow archive” of portraiture, I consider the ubiquitous importance of the “shadow” as a “degenerate” image and organizing principle within these works.

This investigation hopes to expose a gross oversight of current art history by investigating the hitherto unexplored resonances between concurrent yet often conflicting visual cultures like those of *Körperkultur*, *Neues Sehen*, and *Neue Sachlichkeit* through the lenses of disability theory, critical theory, media analysis, and aesthetic theory. In doing so, I hope to take up the task of Tobin Siebers’ second chapter of *Disability Aesthetics*, “The Aesthetics of Human Disqualification,” and analyze the impact of an aesthetics of human disqualification on Weimar culture: certainly, much of the so-called “degeneracy” of degenerate art in Nazi discourse is linked to what was seen as transgressions of form – including bodies distorted, disfigured, or otherwise not upholding the racial ideal fortified by interwar *Körperkultur*. This thesis project follows Siebers’ lead but provides his inquiry, which understandably foregrounds the actions of the “Third Reich” from 1933 onward when discussing German aesthetics of disqualification, with a pre-history. I hope to demonstrate the pervasive effects of aesthetic thought that precipitated the systematic desecration of both artistic innovation and human bodies, inverting Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the “aestheticization of politics” in fascism to look at the politics of aesthetics undergirding Weimar body culture, social hygiene, and visual cultures.

## Chapter One: Weimar *Körperkultur* and Its Disqualified Bodies

Aesthetics is the domain in which the sensation of otherness is felt at its most powerful, strange, and frightening. Whether the effect is beauty and pleasure, ugliness and pain, or sublimity and terror, the emotional impact of one body on another is experienced as an assault on autonomy and a testament to the power of otherness.... This is why the study of oppression requires an understanding of aesthetics—not only because oppression uses aesthetic judgments for its violence but also because the signposts of how oppression works are visible in the history of art, where aesthetic judgments about the creation and appreciation of bodies are openly discussed.

Tobin Siebers, “The Aesthetics of Disqualification”<sup>32</sup>

The film is the greatest teacher because it teaches not only through the brain but through the whole body.

Vsevolod Pudovkin<sup>33</sup>

Any investigation into the Weimar *Volkskörper*, *Körperkultur*, and their visual representations is not only an investigation into body politics, but also into moral epistemology, aesthetic philosophy, and the formation of totalitarian hegemony. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes that physical injury is made invisible by *discourses* of war: it is abstracted and repressed in civilian life insofar as it is obscured by rhetoric expounding the power and virility of the national body.<sup>34</sup> The Weimar equivalent of this repression manifests itself in the rigidly normative *Körperkultur*, a branch of the larger bourgeois *Lebensreform* (“life reform”) movement existing from roughly 1890-1930 and its subcultures such as *Freikörperkultur* (nudism) organized around leisure, health, and class.<sup>35</sup> Alongside new theories of human experience and perception, *Körperkultur* pursued *der neue Mensch*, an ideal “new human,” as its object and justification for eugenic aesthetics. Such a new body and new human would supposedly make a new

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<sup>32</sup> Tobin Siebers, “The Aesthetics of Human Disqualification,” in *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 28-30.

<sup>33</sup> Pudovkin quoted in Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 160.

<sup>34</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Further discussion of *Lebensreform* can be found in Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History, 1890-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

society achieved through scientific and technological advancements possible. Aspirations for an improved postwar future thus became ingrained in interwar *Lebensreform*, particularly in *Körperkultur*. *Körperkultur* also drew on the push towards *Anschauungsunterricht* (“visual instruction”)<sup>36</sup> in medical science that visualized new discoveries or techniques of hygiene for the masses to develop a prescriptive visual culture that permeated all facets of life in the period – from the media consumed to the shops lining the streets. This chapter will perform close textual and contextual analysis of two major interwar German films that each re-present *Körperkultur* ideals and perpetuate the legacy of social degeneracy theory, demonstrating the surreptitious omnipresence of both in Weimar visual culture.

*Körperkultur* gained widespread traction during the interwar period by becoming a part of the common culture through *Kulturfilme* (directly, “culture films”).<sup>37</sup> The embedding of *Körperkultur* aesthetics in film led to its technological (which is to say, material), experiential, and physical reproduction across individual bodies. Many films of the period were subsidized by government funds and distributed by state-run production companies like the *Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft* (UFA). Shortly after the United

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<sup>36</sup> The exhibition culture of the late nineteenth century would popularize the use of models, diagrams, “living pictures” or films, x-rays, and other artistic representations of statistics and medical knowledge to effectively and accessibly disseminate complex information and instruction to the general public in Europe. This multimodal structure of learning was perhaps influenced by the work of Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, whose praxis depended on the synthesis of mental and “physical” education as well as a blending of pedagogical modes. The apex of this form in Germany can be seen in *GeSoLei*, the *Gesundheits Pflege, Sozial Fürsorge, und Leibesübung* exhibition at Düsseldorf in 1926, which included sections on prisons, how to choose a marriage partner, and other eugenic considerations. Steve Choe, *Afterlives: Allegories of Film and Mortality in Early Weimar Germany* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 52-53.

<sup>37</sup> On this documentary subgenre of German film, see F. Lampe “*Kulturfilm und Filmkultur*” in *Das Kulturfilmbuch*, 19-27, ed. Edgar Beyfuss and Alexander Kossowsky (Berlin: Chrysellus’scher Verlag, 1924). As Robert Heynen argues, the view held by Lampe was that “*Kulturfilme* offered social hygienic possibilities tied to new ways of seeing.” Robert Heynen, *Degeneration and Revolution: Radical Cultural Politics and the Body in Weimar Germany* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 449.

States entered World War I by declaring war on Germany, the April 28, 1917, *Vossische Zeitung* commemorated the founding of the *Bild- und Filmamt* (BUFA) and its new, essentially modern weapon – what could perhaps be called a weapon of *soft power* – joining the war:

...It has long been thought that this war may be decided exclusively on the strength of the sword and the purity of purpose alone. It gradually has become clear that, in this battle for life and death, all weapons, even the intellectual and moral, need to be used, and it was only after two years of war that the first official attempts to include the most important of these weapons, namely *the image* and *the film*, in the arsenal of warfare has been made.<sup>38</sup>

While the *Vossische Zeitung* may have been referring to propaganda film, it was inadvertently also addressing the way that state-funded production companies – including UFA, founded in December 1917 – developed an archival arsenal of film on social hygiene topics (venereal diseases, birthing, etc.), producing short science “body” films that were later recycled and intercut into sequences in their popular science films and more mainstream fare after World War I.<sup>39</sup> However, the educational function of many UFA *Kulturfilme* had to be softened over time so the films could be eagerly consumed by the general public. The following section will examine two popular post-war German films, the “educational” *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (1925) and the narrative film *Nerven* (1919) to investigate the impact of *Körperkultur*’s soft power on interwar German visual culture.

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<sup>38</sup> Emphases and translation are my own. “*Die Mobilmachung des Bildes: Aus der Tätigkeit des ‘BuFa,’*” *Vossische Zeitung*, April 28, 1917. Digitization made available through the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> For more on UFA’s medical archive and films on sexual hygiene, see Michael Thomas Taylor, Annette F. Timms, and Rainer Herrn, eds., *Not Straight from Germany: Sexual Publics and Sexual Citizenship since Magnus Hirschfeld* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017); Maria Makela, “Rejuvenation and Regen(d)eration: *Der Steinachfilm*, Sex Glands, and Weimar-Era Visual and Literary Culture,” *German Studies Review* 38 no. 1 (February 2015), 35-62, 237; and Heynen’s *Degeneration and Revolution*.

### *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*

One of the most striking examples of Weimar *Körperkultur* visual culture is an UFA production titled *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit: Ein Film über moderne Körperkultur* (“Ways to Strength and Beauty: A Film about Modern Body Culture”).<sup>40</sup> This lush – if bizarre – film shows a series of vignettes instructing the viewer on living a beautiful and powerful life through proper maintenance of the body: massaging babies to encourage muscle growth, throwing weights on a ridge in the nude, balancing on a pier while stretching, and more. Other scenes display the social and moral obligation of fitness through the examples of saving a drowning person or defending oneself against an attacker – acts that cement, in some way, the futurity, social hygiene, and physical health of the race.<sup>41</sup> Fitness is also used here to establish a relationship to the elements through the “naturalized” body and a bucolic, primordial German landscape that would become a staple of National Socialist Realism. Though admittedly an aesthetic feat of filmmaking,

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<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Kaufmann and Wilhelm Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit: Ein Film über moderne Körperkultur* (“Ways to Strength and Beauty: A Film about Modern Body Culture”), Germany: UFA-Kulturfilmabteilung, 1925. The film, which features the first on-screen appearance of actress and director Leni Riefenstahl, also serves as a precursor to her German documentary film of the 1936 Olympics, *Olympia* (1938). A noted Nazi collaborator and propagandist, Riefenstahl directed *Triumph des Willens* and *Olympia*, which premiered on Hitler’s birthday in 1938 and was secretly funded in its entirety by the Nazi government. The film is broken into two parts: “The Festival of Nations” and “The Festival of Beauty.” Like *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, “The Festival of Beauty” focuses on concerted sport and uses slow-motion to emphasize the balletic quality of the athletes’ bodies. In a 1975 essay on Riefenstahl, Susan Sontag notes that it is insidious to deny the role of Riefenstahl’s documentary films made during the rise of the “Third Reich” as propaganda; I would extend this sentiment to *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*. Furthermore, of such aesthetics, Susan Sontag writes: “The rendering of movement in grandiose and rigid patterns is another element in common, for *such choreography rehearses the very unity of the polity*. The masses are made to take form, be design. Hence mass athletic demonstrations, a choreographed display of bodies, are a valued activity in all totalitarian countries; and the art of the gymnast, so popular now in Eastern Europe, also evokes recurrent features of fascist aesthetics; the holding in or confining of force; *military precision*.” Emphases are my own. Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” *New York Review of Books*, February 6, 1975.

<sup>41</sup> This includes demonstrating the gendered social obligations of the body through fictionalized Roman example: feminine rites of the body associated with the modern era are depicted as having been the norm among upper class Roman women in a tableaux towards the end of the film wherein smiling slave girls bathe, shave, and wrap their mistress in what an intertitle refers to as an ancient bra.

it also served to weaponize the medium of film in the name of a normate and eugenic body culture.

Certainly, the film's director Nicholas Kaufmann saw film as a tool (if not a weapon) to be instrumentalized by body culture. Originally trained as a doctor, the director writes of his film as the inception of "film in service of body culture,"<sup>42</sup> that which elevates and makes the "eternal value of the beautiful human body felt."<sup>43</sup> Kaufmann described all media other than film (newspapers, brochures, lectures, etc.) as insufficient means with which to communicate the importance of bodily hygiene ("*Leibespflege*") since film is the "favorite pastime of contemporary people" ("*Lieblingsunterhaltung des neuzeitlichen Menschen*"), and explicitly discussed the importance of modeling *Körperkultur* ideals in film as "the many possibilities...the viewer can achieve for themselves."<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Kaufmann advertised the film as utterly unprecedented and having premiered with "exemplary success...at Ufa-Palast am Zoo, the biggest movie theater in Germany...with a daily sold-out house," framing it not only as a must-see educational film but also as an unmissable cultural event that "arrived at the perfect moment."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Perhaps notably, the essays in the new film journal (the titles of which include "Masculine Bodily Beauty in Film," "Film in Service of Expressive Art," "From Antiquity to Culture Film," and "On the Essential Values of the Body's Image"), appear in a blackletter type like that used in Paul Schultze-Naumburg's conservative *Kunst und Rasse*, whereas the publication's type is a generic serif. I owe Dr. Janelle Blankenship a great debt of gratitude for making a copy of this trade publication accessible to me firsthand during the research process. Nicholas Kaufmann, "*Der Film im Dienste der Körperkultur*," *Die Körperkultur im Film 1* (Dresden: Verlag der Schönheit, Richard A. Giesecke, 1926), 2.

<sup>43</sup> This excerpt comes from the introductory page to *Die Körperkultur im Film* as part of what is apparently a running editorial section of comments. Richard Giesecke, "*Ideale Nacktheit Folge VIII*," *Die Körperkultur im Film 1*, i.

<sup>44</sup> Kaufmann, "*Der Film im Dienst*," 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

At first glance, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* appears to be a celebration of different cultures as well as their methods of fitness and dance. However, the film early on summarizes *Körperkultur*'s relationship to otherness and belies the slightly sinister operations of its ideology when an intertitle declares that "[t]he origin of all body culture is to balance out existing damages."<sup>46</sup> This dictum seems both recuperative and repressive, instating a rigid binary repeatedly demonstrated in the film through a comparative sequencing schema of what is "damage" and what is its "corrective." Moreover, the film depends on cinematic stylistic conventions of continuity editing to establish "cause and effect" relationships between certain kinds of bodies and their behavior. Equal parts comic and serious, vivacious and morbid, playful and proscriptive, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* is an unparalleled example of *Körperkultur*'s attempts to normalize specific techniques and ideals of the body while abnormalizing others through popular culture.

Throughout the film, the aesthetic is often Romantic in setting and neoclassical in style: harmony is exuded by bodies moving in concert and often again mirrored in their surroundings – by trees blowing in the wind, in the water reflecting them below, or in stark, heavily stylized shadows. *Körperkultur* bodies seem to coalesce with their environment, simultaneously expressing the contradicting values of organicity and artificiality, nature and culture, rhythm and *Takt*.<sup>47</sup> But instead of staging a human intervention into nature, *Körperkultur* proposes a fantastical return to nature though

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<sup>46</sup> "Der Anfang aller Körper-Kultur [sic] ist es, die vorhandenen Schäden auszugleichen." Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 11:51.

<sup>47</sup> Of the Weimar popular science film *Das Blumenwunder* (The Miracle of Flowers), for example, Janelle Blankenship writes, "[t]he term *Takt* on the one hand, recalls the industrialist military march, yet it also gives vitalist processes a new agency; plant rhythm speaks through the tap of time-lapse, 'the machinic *Takt* of modernity.'" Janelle Blankenship, "'Film-Symphonie vom Leben und Sterben der Blumen': Plant Rhythm and Time-Lapse Vision in *Das Blumenwunder*," *Intermedialités* 16 (Autumn 2010), 26.

harnessing the power of the body (and overtly classicizing nudity, as seen in Figures 1 & 2) to become an extension of the natural world rather than an intrusion into it.

Much of the film depends on classicizing aesthetics in hopes of establishing a genetic claim to physical superiority. These tableaux include a scopophilic “judgment of Paris”<sup>48</sup> scene where the most virtuous and graceful woman is deemed the fairest. Similarly, it is only the blonde Teuton that can jump over six horses in a strange vignette seemingly demonstrating an Aryan heritage (if not birthright) constituted by an innate, “natural” connection to the elements, superior command over the body, and beauty. The importance of classicizing bodily ideals as well as the German connection to “antique” Teutonic “war kings” to *Körperkultur* is clear from several montage sequences that establish a supposedly direct continuity between ancient Greek body culture and present-day German sport.<sup>49</sup>

Despite Germany’s defeat in World War I, an intertitle assures the audience that physical fitness and supremacy is still something on which the country can pride itself: “today it is in not the military drill, but in sport that the source of a nation’s strength lays... and that is the way that the classical ideals of body culture return to their full due.”<sup>50</sup> *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* posits a conjured nostalgia for an “ancient” yet German (Teutonic) way of being that *never precisely was* through its depiction of

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<sup>48</sup> This classical scene in which the prince Paris judges Artemis the most beautiful among the goddesses was revived by neoclassicism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before becoming an allegory of racial purity. *The Judgment of Paris* motif would remain popular during the Nazi’s inoculation of visual culture. Ivo Saliger would paint a similar scene in 1939 to express Aryan claims to supremacy and beauty. Kaufmann, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 18:05-18:25.

<sup>49</sup> Scene 7:01-8:06 is echoed in the weight throwing demonstrations of the fifth section, “Sport.” Kaufmann, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*.

<sup>50</sup> “In unserer Zeit waren es zunächst nur die männlichen Jugendlichen, die die Körperertüchtigung pflegten – und das in vielen Ländern wiederum nur beim Militär...Heute ist es nicht militärischer Drill, sondern der Sport, der die Quelle der Stärke einer Nation ist ...Und das ist der Weg, wie die klassischen Ideale der Körper-Kultur wieder zu ihrem vollen Recht kommen.” Kaufmann, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 1:27:27-1:28:03.



outdoor sport and a glorification of Greek antiquity that the thoroughly urban, degenerate audience cannot appreciate (Figure 3): a line of city museum goers including “new types,” artists, perverts, would-be philosophers, an indifferent old woman, and a sleeping old man are shown as incapable of appropriately engaging with a classical Greek statue (*venus pudica* type). After a panning camera takes in the patrons’ blasé reactions, a classical statue comes alive to shield herself and recoil from their degenerate gazes.



**Figure 1:** Nicholas Kaufmann and Wilhelm Prager, dir. *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit: Ein Film über moderne Körperkultur* (“*Ways to Strength and Beauty: A Film about Modern Body Culture*”) (Germany: UFA-Kulturfilmabteilung, 1925), 1:11:41



**Figure 2:** Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 32:58



**Figure 3** left: Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 8:58

**Figure 4**, right: *ibid*, 3:35

In part, such focus on classicizing aesthetics is certainly an escapist tendency. The film explicitly expresses anxiety about the state of the body following industrialization despite its own mechanistic representation of the body at work.<sup>51</sup> To this end, it critiques the left-wing *intelligentsia* (incarnated here as a physically impotent shut-in who closes his blinds and hunches over a book despite his glasses, Figure 4) and Modernists who

<sup>51</sup> Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 3:18.

embraced the urban environment as a rich petri dish of culture, technology, and protest. Following the bookworm in Figure 4's appearance, an intertitle reads, "[D]er Körper jedoch wird vernachlässigt zwischen Bücher und Maschinen...": "between books and machines, the body will be neglected." This sequence leads into an avant-garde montage scene revealing the cacophonous (or symphonic, per Walter Ruttmann's 1927 film, *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt*) and chaotic nature of the modern metropolis before an intertitle bemoans urban experience. That this sequence appears within the first five minutes of the film stakes out the importance of the film's project – to "rescue" the neglected bodies of the urban bourgeois through the methods of *Körperkultur*.

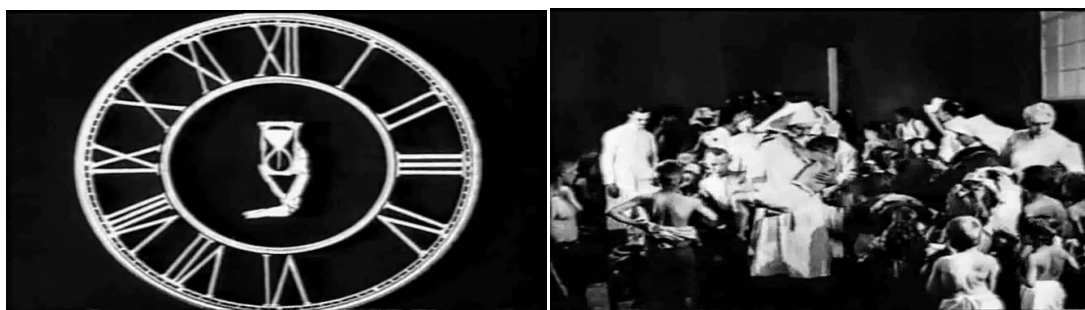
*Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* decries the city, pleading for the health of "[w]e, the poor, shabby people condemned to live in the metropolis" precluded from a "natural" lifestyle by urban industrialism and morally degenerate pastimes favored by the likes of *die neue Frau*.<sup>52</sup> A rowdy bar crowd and a debaucherous typist are shown drinking the night away, treating their bodies "with complete recklessness," according to an intertitle, while an accelerated clock hand – anthropomorphized into a literal, skeletal hand (perhaps here a death's hand rather than a death's head) – suggests both the hasty passing or "shock" (*Erlebnis*) of urban time and the premature decay of their bodies and minds.<sup>53</sup> The clock strokes five, and the hand grabs the numeral as it transforms into an hourglass (Figure 5). This doubling of icons for time and death is redundant and rhetorical, fatalistically lambasting the viewer before an intertitle ("Be certain: her sins will have

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<sup>52</sup> Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 4:00.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 4:45-5:12. This sequence could also reflect the associations between drinking and degeneration posed by both members of the *Lebensreform* movement and the medical community in turn of the century Germany. Emil Kraepelin, a psychiatrist and student of Wilhelm Wundt who lead the DFA (see pages 12-13), was notably a recognized proponent of alcohol abstinence. Michael Hau, "The Dialectic of Medical Enlightenment: War, Alcohol Consumption and Public Hygiene in Germany, 1910–1925," *History* 104 no. 359 (January 2019), 151.

their day”) connects these social behaviors to a legacy of hereditary degeneracy by cutting to a children’s hospital (Figure 6). This focus on the child as the ultimate victim of social degeneracy reinscribes the child’s role as cultural telos and promotes the covert eugenic program upheld throughout the film.



**Figure 5**, left: Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 5:09

**Figure 6**, right: *ibid*, 5:33

Even the film’s many sections featuring expressionistic dance (*Ausdruckstanz*) seem to depict the art form in service of “naturalizing” ideals, suggesting that performances of grotesquerie<sup>54</sup> are appropriate insofar as they represent the rhythmic and plastic potential of an athletic human form.<sup>55</sup> At 24:55, a member of the *Loheland-Schule* performs a dance inspired by the natural rhythms of breathing while situated in a field. She moves like a blooming and withering plant, echoing *Laban-Schule* dancer Dussia Bereska’s “*Die Orchidee*” and Niddy Impekoven’s “*Das Leben der Blume*” sequences

<sup>54</sup> Kaufmann, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 23:1. *Ausdruckstänzerin* Niddy Impekoven performs an excerpt of a dance number the intertitle calls “grotesque.” This perhaps also refers to the tradition of puppet-theatre that Impekoven is emulating. Further discussion of historic examples of the comic-grotesque German puppetry tradition can be found in Karl Friedrich Flögel, *Geschichte des grotesk-komischen: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Menschheit* (Munich: Georg Mueller, 1914), 28-70.

<sup>55</sup> *Ausdruckstanz* and *Körperkultur* seem to have a complicated relationship: while *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* celebrates the style’s organic athleticism and proprietors like Rudolf von Laban would continue their dance practices under the “Third Reich,” other dancers and companies like that of Mary Wigman, whose school is also featured in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (46:35-48:22), would be labeled “degenerate” for leftist associations and avant-gardism. Even photos of Wigman are among those seized by the Nazis as “*entartete*” and then destroyed, based on the 1941/1942 typescript inventory prepared by the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* that was digitized and made public by the Victoria & Albert Museum.

later in the film (both 37:18-39:50) and perhaps anticipating the 1926 *Unterrichts-Film-Gesellschaft* feature, *Das Blumenwunder*.<sup>56</sup> The inclusion of *Ausdruckstanz* in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* communicates that the body may be momentarily contorted and misshapen as long as it remains a vehicle for naturalized beauty and strength. Alternatively, it foregrounds the physiognomic imagery represented in the film as glorification of an idealized yet intuitive bodily movement over the “rational” and restricting style of more traditional dance like ballet.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to narrative and aesthetic motifs, three production techniques are used to great effect throughout the film: an “x-ray” penetrating vision schema, *Zeitlupen* slow-motion sequences, and a comparative sequencing editing style evocative of split screen frames. Each bears the mark of its era and contemporaneous technological developments in medical and cinematic imaging. While the former techniques provide invasive gazes and unprecedented access to phenomena previously invisible to the human eye, the latter emulates a diagnostic model. These methods allow the film to present us with new rhythms, temporalities,<sup>58</sup> and spaces in and around the body as well as frameworks with which to understand them. As such, all three techniques reinforce a viewer’s perception

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<sup>56</sup> For detailed discussion of *Das Blumenwunder*, its technical innovations, and its place in deconstructing human temporality, please see Blankenship, “*Film-Symphonie vom Leben*.”

<sup>57</sup> Such a view of *Ausdruckstanz*’s inclusion in this film would reconcile the film’s physiognomic and eugenic tendencies with the avant-garde dance. In *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz*, Richard T. Gray writes, “[*Lebensphilosophie*’s] stress on intuitive knowledge is one of the most prominent themes in the physiognomic literature of this [interwar] period. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to maintain that in the interwar years physiognomic thought becomes a kind of standard bearer or universally valid test case for the superiority of the intuitive over rational forms of cognition.” Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 182.

<sup>58</sup> “The greater our powers of visualisation, the better able shall we be to make this picture richer in detail and more true to Nature. We can also think of this coming into being and then dying away as though it took place cinematographically; then we participate in the rhythm, and so get the right impression of the species as a rhythmical sequence of acts.” Emphasis is Blankenship’s. Jakob von Uexküll quoted in Blankenship, “*Film-Symphonie vom Leben*,” 5.

of watching a research film, but also conflate the experience of “scientific looking” with the entertaining *Kulturfilm* that “trains” its spectators.

Several segments in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* depend on cultural fascination with the x-ray, a well-publicized technique-cum-fetish object, to support *Körperkultur* directives. In *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*, Lisa Cartwright demonstrates that the x-ray image has been a lasting source of wonder and angst since the first radiograph taken by Wilhelm Röntgen of his wife Anna Bertha Röntgen's hand became a media spectacle (Figure 10).<sup>59</sup> In *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, the *aesthetic* of the x-ray is harnessed to demonstrate the scientific and technological prowess of the filmmakers while also establishing connections between the image, allegories of death, and a construction of health that appears to bridge the two. Alternatively, it could also signal the sustained influence of an expressionist aesthetic: Robert Wiene's *Genuine: die Tragödie eines seltsamen Hauses* provides a notable precedent for this imagery in the form of an anthropomorphized (or skeletonized) clock, wherein the clock “face” replaces the skeleton's skull (Figure 7). This substitution's anatomical metaphor and word play are both echoed in the skeletal forearm that literalizes the German term, “*Uhrzeiger*” (“pointer,” Figure 8), on *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*'s mor(t)al clock.

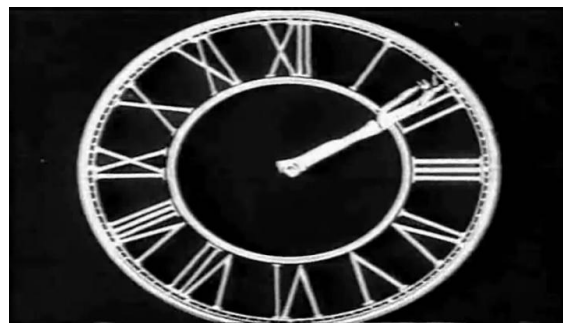
The x-ray “aesthetic” reappears three different ways throughout the film. Beyond the death's hand, the first use of this aesthetic (12:01-12:07) is the only one that appears to be a real radiograph image of scoliosis (Figure 9). An implicating intertitle asks the

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<sup>59</sup> Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 115.



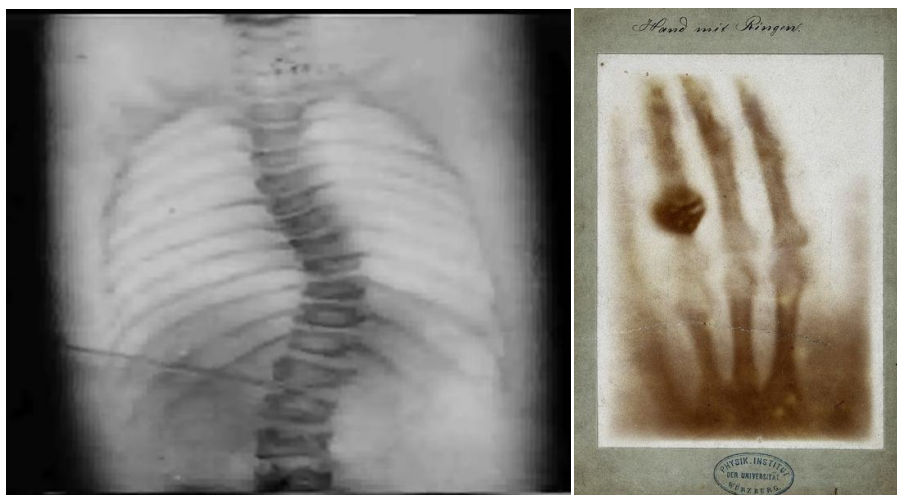
**Figure 8:** Robert Wiene, dir. *Genuine: Genuine: die Tragödie eines seltsamen Hauses* (released in English as *Genuine: Tale of a Vampire*) (Berlin: Decla-Bioscop, 1920), 22:13



**Figure 7:** Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 4:52

viewer if their child has a “straight and powerful” backbone before a pointer traces the curve of the x-rayed spine, exaggerating its deviancy. Subsequently, crawling exercises are “prescribed” in the following sequence as a method to correct abnormal curvature. Physical deformity and degeneration are diagnosed in artful sequences and diagrams, as in the second use of the x-ray motif. The following sequence relies on lay (mis)understandings of x-ray procedures rather than actual imaging to produce voyeuristic access to the bodies presented: a seamstress and a shoemaker are shown working, hunched over, and then, almost as if made into an x-ray image, shown shirtless, decomposing and crumpling into their unhealthy postures over a black backdrop before the *mise-en-scène* and their clothes return and they resume their trades.<sup>60</sup> (13:22-13:45; Figures 11 & 12) Lastly, multiple paper-cut animations are used to evoke skeletal imagery, as in the clock hand and, later, to demonstrate effective breathing postures. In the latter example, two men are shown in profile against a black background like the figures in the previous sequences (Figure 13) before all detail fades and the viewer

<sup>60</sup> Nudity accessed through “x-ray vision” was a popular voyeuristic trope in visual culture following the development of the x-ray despite the fact that the x-ray did not merely see through clothing. Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, 121-122.



**Figure 9**, left: Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (detail), 12:06

**Figure 10**, right: Wilhelm Röntgen, “*Hand mit Ringen*,” radiograph, December 22, 1895. Accessed through Wikimedia Commons (public domain)

sees only their outlines, “ribs,” and “lungs,” which the hunched figure on the right cannot fully inflate (Figure 14). Interestingly, these “x-rays” are shown in inverted colors from a true radiograph, as the background of the image becomes white and the animated anatomies become black. Despite this, a later animation of a corseted woman’s internal organs is white against a black ground, a more “naturalistic” color scheme for an x-ray image (17:15-17:35).

In each example, the “x-ray” becomes part of the film’s surveillant apparatus, documenting and typologizing the film’s subjects, who appear just as unaware of their own observation and bodily deviancy as the film’s own viewers. But unlike an actual x-ray, this “x-ray” vision does not *physically* penetrate the spectator’s flesh: viewers are safe in their critical distance and in the image’s own artificial nature and further face no consequences for their voyeuristic viewing act.<sup>61</sup> The filmic representation of

<sup>61</sup>When transferred to the cinematic apparatus, the x-ray image is abstracted from its physical consequences, as neither the viewer nor the filmmaker is imminently affected by the radiation that produces





**Figure 11**, top left: Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 13:41

**Figure 12**, top right: *ibid*, 13:44

**Figure 13**, bottom left: *ibid*, 16:23

**Figure 14**, bottom right: *ibid*, 16:25

the x-ray positions the spectator as technician, the one implementing the scientific intervention into a body in need of imaging and, in several examples in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, correcting the maligned body through proper body culture. As Cartwright implies, the x-ray is a purifying technology: “[t]he body once rendered innately deviant is now open to ‘corrective’ physiological regulation and transformation.”<sup>62</sup> This idea is further enforced by the comparative sequencing used throughout the film.

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the image. Nonetheless, as subjects “imaged” (which is to say, in some way depicted or re-presented) by *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, viewers of the film are not entirely immune to the physical effects of that which images them, *Körperkultur*. In this sense, the experience of viewing a *Körperkultur* film replete with “abnormal” x-ray images *is* penetrating. To this end, Cartwright writes, “...the tendency in the analysis of scientific knowledge has been to think the observer as one who remains physically removed from the experimental object. And in the analysis of the cinema, the tendency has been to think the observer as one who remains physically distanced from the profilmic object. But here [with the x-ray] the subject looking is quite literally caught and punished by the surveillant apparatus whose rays do not restrict themselves to the intended object but range out to incorporate the technician. Yet, though he is punished for his act of looking, the radiographer is also rewarded for giving himself up to a greater public good.” Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, 128-129.

<sup>62</sup> Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, 36.

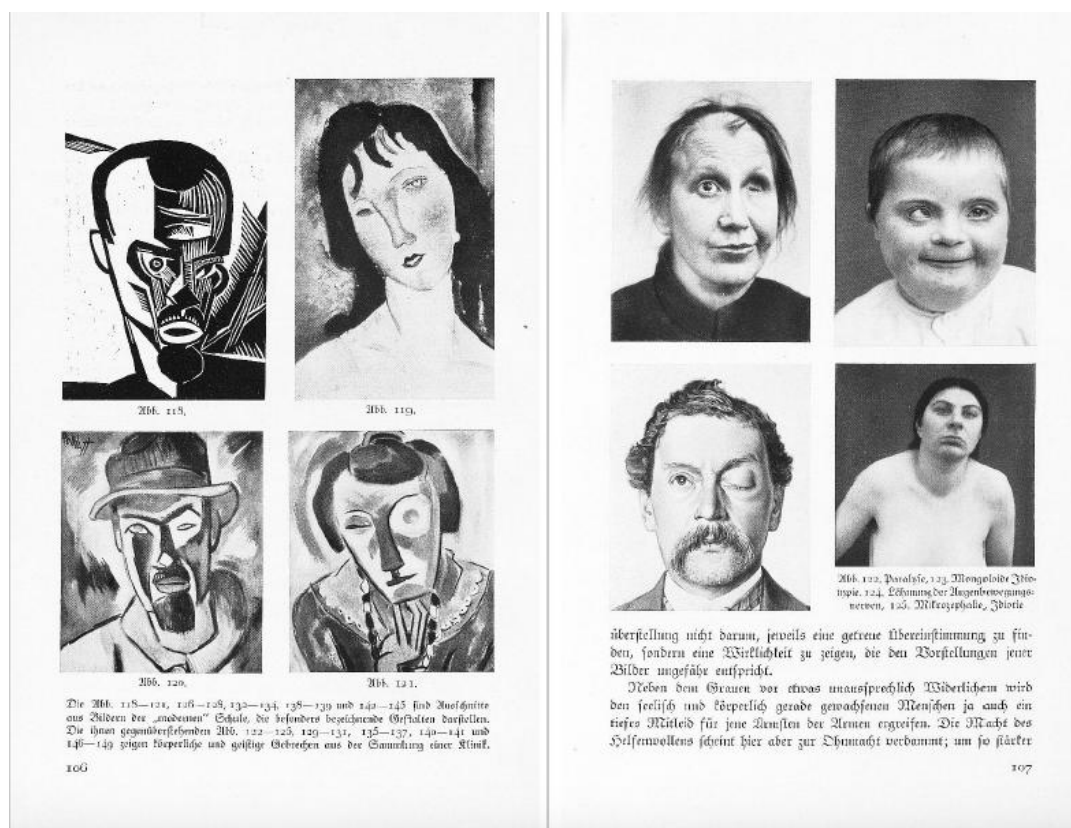
Much like “shot reverse shot” cinematography, the comparative montages used in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* instate a visual logic of continuity and binary relation.

While much of the film models a variety of acceptable bodies and poses, the first quarter emphasizes the more didactic presentation of an aberration and then its correction (as in the scoliosis sequence). Such sequencing clearly defines and delineates which bodies are deemed acceptable and which are pathological, evoking the kind of diagnostic compound visuals seen in the work of Bénédict Morel and later emulated by Schultze-Naumburg in 1928 (Figure 15) and the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition catalog of 1937.<sup>63</sup>

The visual logic of such a diagnostic typology yields toxic results and implications in the otherwise conventional editing of the film, such as in a boxing competition between a German (Eric Mielenz) and a Barbadian (Rocky Knight) athlete. After a shot of Mielenz and Knight running alongside each other, only Mielenz’s warm up (jumping rope, stretching) is shown before the shadowboxing routine that follows. Though the match is dynamic and the composition of the shot does change, the film’s concerted classicism and symmetry are preserved and even heightened by the two figures’ symmetrical motions shown “in relief” against the sea. While the film doesn’t declare a winner, their match ends with another intertitle before cutting to Mielenz “practicing” with a punching bag that he knocks off its frame. This, coupled with the

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<sup>63</sup> See page 8 in the introduction for more on Morel.

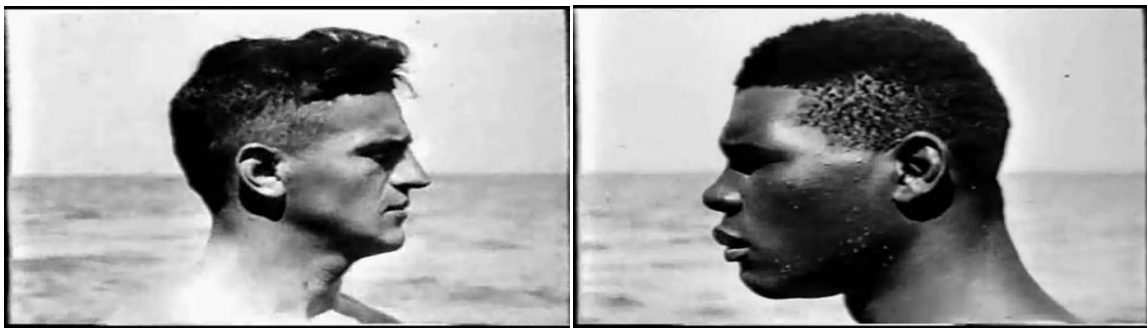


**Figure 15:** Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Kunst und Rasse* (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1935), 106-107. This book (originally published in 1928) was notably published by the same publishing house that published Hans F. K. Günther's text, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (Racial Science of the German People). In some ways, Schultze-Naumburg's text picks up on and expands Günther's projects such as his 1926 *Adel und Rasse* (Nobility and Race), wherein Günther draws on medieval busts to refer to the "beauty" of the Nordic race in art.

inclusion of Mielenz's warm up, insidiously implies that he is the superior athlete. While we could imagine that a film produced by a German government agency might privilege German nationals' screen time, other less directly comparative sequences in the film show no such similar bias against American, Russian, or Italian athletes, among others.

The duration of the match is shown in profile (as are the fencing sequences prior) even though none of the preceding scenes set the stage with silhouetted close-ups of the opponents. Instead of showing two frontal, facial close-ups conjoined by shot-reverse-shot editing that would catch the viewers in the crosshairs of the two athletes' locked gazes, they are shown in profile (Figures 16 & 17). Both are shown in direct profile,

though Knight's close-up is revealed to be slightly more zoomed in based on the position of the horizon line relative to that of Mielenz's close-up. Additionally, this enlargement causes Knight to look substantially bigger than Mielenz – another trope of physical distortion often used in the representation of black bodies – even though the men are shown to be similar heights and sizes in the following scenes. Though this zoom could have been done in the name of keeping the horizon lines consistent between shots, its effects remain potent regardless of intent. While this sequence is otherwise unremarkable, the use of shot-reverse-shot editing to sequentially feature an Aryan and a black boxer in profile undeniably recalls the visual language of phrenology and physiognomy to effectively stigmatize Rocky Knight's features compared to those of Eric Mielenz. Though the comparative sequence is brief at around four seconds, the format is not repeated anywhere else in the film or between any other competing athletes. Insofar as it is tethered to the history of physiognomy, the profile shot absorbs the individuals into racialized types. In German visual culture, the physiognomic profile appears as early as 1775 (both in silhouetted and detailed illustration) in Johann Caspar Lavater's late eighteenth-century treatises (Figure 18), makes a major resurgence in the Weimar period, and culminates with Nazi "*Rassenkunde*" (Figure 19). Though this particular sequence



**Figure 16**, left: Kaufmann and Prager, *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 1:00:05

**Figure 17**, right: *ibid*, 1:00:07

directly invokes the visual language of physiognomy, the editing used throughout the film does so more covertly by enforcing a strict binary of bodies and behaviors that emerges as eugenic and prescriptive. As such, both the content and the structure of *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* reveal the anxieties and imperatives of *Körperkultur* to produce a film that measures the value of bodies (and lives) exclusively by their efficiency, action, and normative beauty.



**Figure 18**, left: Johann Caspar Lavater, Image of woodcut from *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, 1775-1778. Image in the public domain (accessed through Wikimedia Commons)

**Figure 19**, right: “*Bilder deutscher Rassen I*” (“Images of German Races 1”), color offset print, 1935. © Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

*Nerven: “Über blutige Schlachtfeldern trauern Völker”*



**Figure 20:** Josef Fenneker, “*Nerven*,” promotional poster, 1919. © Stadtmuseum Bocholt/Josef Fenneker

If *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* visualizes the possible apotheosis of the Weimar body, Robert Reinert’s *Nerven* (1919)<sup>64</sup> presents its potential fall. *Nerven* depicts the postwar phenomenon of “nerves” as a threatening force that rots the body – and the body politic – from the inside out, providing the nerve-afflicted body as “metaphor and metonym for the nervous sociopolitical system.”<sup>65</sup> To this end, one of the film’s Expressionistic posters (Figure 20) does not represent a figure or character from the film; instead, it conjures up the sense of hysteria and converts national *Angst* into a traumatic portrait. This gaunt, ghastly face – “*Nerven*” manifested in flesh – looks less than human and more like a spectral vision of sheer terror. Since it cannot be connected to any one

<sup>64</sup> Robert Reinert, *Nerven* (“Nerves”), Munich, Germany: Monumental-Filmwerke GmbH, 1919. Helmar Lerski notably served as the cinematographer for the film (though the opening credits name him as “Halma Lerski”). Lerski’s *Köpfe des Alltags* series will be revisited in chapter two.

<sup>65</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “A Finger in the Wound: On Pain, Scars, and Suffering,” *Representations* 146 (Spring 2019), 36. Though Scheper-Hughes studies a different time and place – impoverished and starving communities in 1980s Brazil – she describes a similar phenomenon: an invisible network of systemic oppression and inequality is made visible insofar as its various products and maladies all share, in the mind of those who live under it, the quality of making the body shake. A myriad of afflictions and illnesses that register in different parts of the body all share the title and symptoms of the Portuguese “*nervos*,” much like early twentieth-century and interwar interpretations of varying forms of trauma, or, the “nerves” in question in Reinert’s film.

character or filmic type, the face in the poster perhaps depends on its ambiguity to communicate the film's affect and produce a broader "portrait" of the postwar nation. Throughout the film, the epidemic is shown to plague the shell-shocked *Kriegszitterer* ("war shiverers" or neurotics)<sup>66</sup> and the average civilian alike, affectively suturing together the distinct traumatic experiences of nervous subjects on both the home and war fronts.

In *Nerven*, nerves are depicted as an almost contagious illness: the film follows a chain reaction of nerves beginning with World War I, then a factory explosion, and ending with all but two of the main characters dead. The film opens on a red, smoking pile of war-wounded bodies (Figure 21) even though much of the film takes place in an idyllic German town otherwise unaffected by the war's carnage. Like the shot-reverse shot, this editing choice frames the content of the primary narrative within the context of the war's widespread trauma. The bookending tableaux of the prologue and the epilogue present a diagnostic dyad not altogether unlike those of *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, as it first identifies a malady (murder, war, and madness), its symptoms (protest, delirium, and death), and then offers up a remedy in the form of a fantasy of pre-industrial innocence, tranquility, and simplicity (Figure 23).

While many figures are affected by the resonance of nerves, the main character of Roloff (Figure 22) is presented in the film as the consummate victim of capitalistic greed,

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<sup>66</sup> Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 16.





**Figure 21**, top: Robert Reinert (dir.), *Nerven* (Munich: Monumental-Filmwerke GmbH, 1919), 2:53. Scene from the prologue featuring a mother's "telepathic" connection to her son, who is dying on a World War I battlefield "a thousand miles away." The red tint evokes an intertitle describing the "bloody fields" "over which the German people mourn – and over which filmgoers are directed to remotely grieve through the prologue.

**Figure 22**, bottom: *ibid*, 1:05:02. Scene from the primary narrative depicting Roloff's descent into hallucinatory madness. The purple tint emphasizes the hallucinatory quality of the sequence as well as the uncanny nature of enlarged, grasping hands "psychically" imaged by Roloff.





**Figure 23:** Reinert, *Nerven*, 1:47:30. Scene from the epilogue. The green tint of the epilogue suggests renewal, growth, and pure, untainted nature – a post-war Eden.

traumatic guilt, and inherited psychiatric taint. Though “he appears quite healthy,”<sup>67</sup> Roloff is shown to suffer from insidious invisible difference that positions him amidst the other nerve-afflicted undesirables of his period similarly suffering from the plights of “[d]ie fortschreitende Zivilisation, der Kampf ums Dasein, Angst und Schrecken des Krieges, die Sünden der Eltern...” (1:06:54), a variety of causes ranging from war to hereditary degeneracy (“*Erbkrankheit*”). Knowledge of his own aberration drives Roloff further insane: his earlier, distorted dreamscape hallucinations mutate into images of his workers revolting superimposed over his breakdown, further solidifying the metonymic connection between Roloff and Germany. He reiterates the analogy on which the *Volkskörper* depends: “An meinen eigenen Nerven erkenne ich die Nerven der Welt...Die

<sup>67</sup> “...und macht dabei einen ganz gesunden Eindruck.” Reinert, *Nerven*, 1:05:59.

*Nerven der Welt sind krank.*”<sup>68</sup> Roloff thus explicitly identifies a stable relationship between the state of his mind and the state of his nation, which is further confirmed through the film’s use of frame narratives in the prologue and epilogue. Unable to escape his murderous hallucinations and obstructing the romance between his wife and Johannes, Roloff begs to be killed.<sup>69</sup> His pleas for euthanasia anticipate the 1920 *Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens* (*Permission for the Annihilation of Lives Unworthy of Life*)<sup>70</sup> and the visual culture this rhetoric would produce during the “Third Reich,” such as the 1942 propaganda film, *Ich klage an*. *Ich klage an* is driven by a terminally ill woman’s pleas for euthanasia that are denied and the subsequent legal case in which her husband blames the government for her painful, drawn-out death (from which the film’s title and its criminalizing language, “I accuse” or “charge [you],” is taken). Feeling implicated in her own spouse’s death (that Johannes nonetheless conceals as “apoplexy” [*Schlaganfall*] rather than assisted suicide), *Nerven*’s Elisabeth burns down the family manor, killing Johannes’ sister in the process, and then joins a convent.

The epilogue presents the events of the film as a kind of Old Testament fall, a sin that compels man to start over anew and “return to nature.” In *Afterlives: Allegories of Film and Mortality in Early Weimar Germany*, Steve Choe connects this nature scene to Luder Hermann’s 1879 *Allgemeine Nervenphysiologie*,<sup>71</sup> which identified physical labor as a defense mechanism with which to fortify one’s nerves. This suggests that the classicizing naturalism of *Körperkultur* is also tethered to contemporaneous developments in psychiatric theory and therapy, not just aesthetic conservatism.

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<sup>68</sup> “Through my own nerves, I know the nerves of the world... [and] the nerves of the world are ill.” Translation is my own. Reinert, *Nerven*, 1:15:41-45.

<sup>69</sup> “Eutanasie. Schön sterben nannten es die Griechen.” Reinert, *Nerven*, 1:25:27.

<sup>70</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Choe, *Afterlives*, 29-30.

Furthermore, Choe describes Roloff and Lehrer Johannes as mirrored hysteric masculinities arising in the interwar period and locked in a healthy/unhealthy, productive/unproductive duality.<sup>72</sup> Johannes is preserved not only due to his health but also what Choe suggests is a narcissistic conviction that denies the trauma of the war and, subsequently, Johannes' own mortality:

It is the other who dies, not the self. It is the other who is mentally unstable, unfit, degenerate, and unhealthy. Life is unable to sympathize with that which has been deemed ontologically separate from it, for it judges these beings as useless for its own survival and for the survival of the nation.<sup>73</sup>

Weakened and having succumbed to what is retroactively revealed to be a hereditary taint, Roloff dies whereas Johannes survives: it is a lesson in not only the virtue of euthanasia but also in the power of nostalgia for a pastoral, physically engaged lifestyle that denies the war and ameliorates all traces of its existence. By demonstrating that Johannes can prevail over the events of the film through his physical fortitude, this dyadic structure covertly emulates *Körperkultur* diagnostic models and invokes *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*'s dictum that a nation is no longer measured by its militarism but its physical prowess.<sup>74</sup> Through its narrative structure, stigmatization of postwar disability, emphasis on the power of nature to amend the ails of modern urbanization and warfare, and advocacy for euthanasia, *Nerven* can be understood as a surreptitious reflection of interwar *Körperkultur* ideology based on the legacy of social degeneracy theory, building the foundation for Nazi eugenic policy.

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<sup>72</sup> Choe, *Afterlives*, 26.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>74</sup> See note 50.

## **Crip Bodies and the War-Wounded Under *Körperkultur***

Though non-normate embodiments were not necessarily common in Weimar-era visual culture, they were a part of daily life insofar as disabled veterans dotting the street indexed the German defeat in World War I. The issue of their reintegration into German society was also a matter of coping with national trauma and shame: as Carol Poore notes, World War I was not fought within Germany's borders, and, consequently, its war-wounded appeared as the most visible reminder of the nation's "crippling" defeat.<sup>75</sup> She continues,

[T]he sudden presence of masses of newly disabled men was one of the most pressing tests facing the new Weimar democracy. Could men with these multiple kinds of disabilities be reintegrated into the defeated nation and, if so, how? Were men with such bodies to be viewed as heroes, pitiful victims, or ordinary citizens? What was the relationship going to be between the 'war disabled' and those whose disabilities had other causes (the 'civilian disabled' or 'peacetime disabled')?<sup>76</sup>

As is often the case today, the "civilian disabled" and the war-wounded became conflated in their conditions as simply "disabled" and, thus, "different." Veterans' bodies incarnated the distinct threats of defeat, disease, and disability all at once, making each feel omnipresent in the fraught interwar period. Despite this, disabled bodies are largely (if not altogether) absent from much mainstream visual culture of the period. This "absence" of representation does not transmute into an imposing presence until the Nazi rise to power, during which the government began to exhibit and condemn scores of images of "racially impure" bodies associated with disability, deviancy, and more. In doing so, they challenged and mobilized the public with representations of what

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<sup>75</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 20.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

sociologist Bryan S. Turner calls human “ontological contingency,”<sup>77</sup> or the threat of their own physiological fallibility. This threat depends on the analogy of the national body as well as the human “condition” of embodiment, and effectively enabled the Weimar viewing public to experience a sense of watching their own bodies (and race) fall prey to the maladies that plague the racially “deficient” if they did not take action. Prior to the “Third Reich,” *Körperkultur* all but ameliorated the image of the non-normatively embodied through advancing an “aesthetics of human disqualification,” the process by which violence and oppression to specific bodies is normalized and justified,<sup>78</sup> to “save” the public from confronting their shame, trauma, and “tainted” morals. As mentioned in the introduction, while German aesthetics of human disqualification can be traced back at least a century prior, *Körperkultur* and its myriad manifestations in visual and daily culture remained the major forces of these aesthetics in the Weimar period.

Even though the war leveled the rates of disability among classes,<sup>79</sup> rhetorics of degeneration and physiognomic criminology rendered the disabled undesirable on the grounds of both class and aesthetics. After WWI, however, the congenitally disabled and war-wounded were seen as parallel problems. Social programs sought to retrain veterans, outfit them with prosthetics to improve their work efficiency, and reintegrate them into society, while the perception that the healthiest German men had been mutilated, disabled, or killed by the war encouraged eugenics programs (namely in the form of

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<sup>77</sup> This language is repeated and quoted by disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in *Staring: How We Look* and art historian Suzannah Biernoff in *Portraits of Violence: War and the Aesthetics of Disfigurement*, the texts that brought Turner’s work to my attention. Bryan S. Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2006).

<sup>78</sup> “Disqualification as a symbolic process removes individuals from the ranks of quality human beings, putting them at risk of unequal treatment, bodily harm, and death. That people may be subjected to violence if they do not achieve a prescribed level of quality is an injustice rarely questioned.” Siebers, “The Aesthetics of Human Disqualification,” 24.

<sup>79</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 3.

euthanasia and sterilization) in the name of resource scarcity.<sup>80</sup> Instead of rehabilitation discourses, “Eliminationist” discourses swelled following the 1929 economic crisis.

Simultaneously, the Weimar welfare state was one of the more advanced of its time with regards to disability:

Two laws passed in 1920 were models of progressive policy in this area. Broadly debated within rehabilitation, legal, and political circles, the Prussian Law on Cripples’ Welfare (*Krüppelfürsorgegesetz*) was the first German law to guarantee medical treatment, education, and vocational training to young people with physical disabilities.<sup>81</sup>

Unlike the congenitally disabled, however, veterans were able to gain some social standing – especially in the NSDAP, a budding organization that recognized a vulnerable population and seized the opportunity to curry favor with them, calling them the “first citizens of the nation” and establishing a directorate for the war-wounded in 1930.<sup>82</sup>

Through their embrace by the NSDAP and their use of prosthetics, war-wounded veterans were able to approach a level of respectability denied to others (including their gendered counterpart in art of the period, the syphilitic prostitute, despite Otto Dix’s identification of the two figures as leveled insofar as they are “two victims of capitalism”<sup>83</sup>). Wittingly or not, many war-wounded would later facilitate the institutionalization, sterilization, and euthanization of many disabled persons themselves not physically or functionally very different from the war-wounded through the veterans’ support of the NSDAP and their embrace of a hierarchy of disability that measured the value of bodies by their utility to the economy and the rising fascist movement.

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<sup>80</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 3. On page 45, Poore also identifies the problem of cripples in the interwar period being read by some as a “genetic allegory of the stab-in-the-back legend,” where the healthy were killed in the war and the “unhealthy” and welfare-dependent were left.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 8-13.

<sup>83</sup> Otto Dix, “*Dirne und Kriegsverletzter (Zwei Opfer des Kapitalismus)*,” 1923, pen and ink on cardboard.

The war-wounded and their public presence only served to exacerbate the conflation of disability, deformity, and ugliness: both veterans and those with pre-war conditions were described as being visual sores to the public that offended the sensibilities of normate citizens in their vicinity.<sup>84</sup> Citizens staged protests against plans to locate “cripples’ homes” in their neighborhoods, clearly attempting to restrict the spaces non-normate embodiments could occupy on aesthetic grounds as they cited the displeasure the bourgeois experience upon seeing the war-wounded and congenitally disfigured.<sup>85</sup> This management of non-normate existences by literally dis-locating them made them both physically and visually abject to the *Volkskörper*.

The conflation of disability with disfigurement or ugliness is an important one because it tethers eugenics to aesthetics and vice versa: Poore emphasizes that interwar German discourses of disability are just as much an aesthetic discourse, since beauty, health, and ability were positioned in a dialectic with ugliness, disease, and disability to determine the productive capacity of citizens,

...fueling debates over what should be done with ‘unproductive’ groups of people. In such controversies, social norms were frequently intertwined in

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<sup>84</sup> “Journalists often criticized these veterans [begging on the streets] from an aesthetic standpoint for offensively confronting the postwar public. On November 26, 1918, for example, the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* took men to task ‘who take to begging while insistently emphasizing their suffering and present an ugly sight in the streets and squares of the big cities.’” Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 16. “Should droves of unhappy crippled children be led around [the beach] and allowed to swim among the elegant, cheerful visitors to the spa? People would constantly be looking at these children with curiosity, pity, or disgust. Is that good for the poor cripples? And is it good for those who want to refresh themselves for a few weeks and recover from their responsibilities and from their work in pleasant surroundings at the seaside!” Poore lists other examples including the omission of the word “*Krüppelheim*” from the name of the Oskar-Helene Home due to protest from neighboring “well-to-do” residents who “demanded reassurances that the sight of the young patients would not be ‘repulsive’...It was not a very big step from such hostility toward disabled people in daily life to eugenic thinking that wanted to eliminate them altogether.” Ibid, 52.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

complex ways with aesthetic norms that extolled the healthy and beautiful while condemning the sick, disabled, and ugly.<sup>86</sup>

As evidenced in the filmic case studies of *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* and *Nerven*, eugenic, proto-Fascist *Körperkultur* attitudes were a part of daily life and popular visual culture. But these complex intertwinements of aesthetic and eugenic discourses are precisely those that have yet to be fully excavated, and they are the same intertwinements that I examine in interwar photography in chapter two and in interwar *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting in chapter three. The chapter to follow, “Distortion and Didacticism in Interwar Photographic Portraits,” situates meaningful explorations and theories of photographic perception, distortion, and abstraction alongside the medicalizing form of the typology and the criminological archive. The portrait – including its manifestations in photomontage and cinema – is considered as a specific mode mobilized to varying ideological ends in the period. I analyze how each deployment of photographic “portraiture” compromises or upholds stringent ideals about normate embodiment and bourgeois identity.

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<sup>86</sup>Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 51.



## Chapter Two: Distortion and Didacticism in Interwar Photographic Portraits

Both portraiture and physiognomy rely on the premise that the face is a reliable index of gender, age, social and familial identity, ethnicity, emotion, and much more besides....Faces registers emotion and identity, but they are also conventional markers of the boundary between the human and the nonhuman, and between “civilization and barbarism.”

Suzannah Biernoff, *Portraits of Violence: War and the Aesthetics of Disfigurement* <sup>87</sup>

While the previous chapter explored the effects of discourses of degeneracy and *Körperkultur* (“cult of the body”) on interwar German film, this chapter shifts “focus” to a different medium: photography. The emphasis here, however, is less on overt representations of non-normate or deviant bodies and more on the rhetoric surrounding various photographic practices and their relative perceived hygienics. The beginning of the twentieth century fostered a fixation on the boundaries of perception, and new technological and previously inaccessible ways of seeing heavily impacted interwar conceptions of aesthetic experience. The knowledge of motion and speed (“fugitive” phenomena escaping human perception) invisible to the naked eye made visible by Étienne-Jules Marey’s photographic human locomotion studies was implemented to great effect in Futurist aesthetic discourses, among others.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, time-lapse imaging gave insight into new “rhythms” of organic life, while close-up and aerial photography brought attention to both the micro- and the macro-cosmic dimensions of the world.<sup>89</sup> To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, such new photographic techniques made otherwise abstract

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<sup>87</sup> Biernoff, *Portraits of Violence*, 12

<sup>88</sup> Joshua Ellenbogen, “Camera and Mind,” *Representations* 101 (Winter 2008): 96. See also Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>89</sup> These new rhythms were poignantly described by Jakob von Uexküll (himself influenced by Marey) throughout his writings of the 1920s. See Janelle Blankenship, “‘Film-Symphonie vom Leben und Sterben der Blumen’: Plant Rhythm and Time-Lapse Vision in *Das Blumenwunder*,” *Intermedialités* 16 (Autumn 2010): 83-103.

knowledge of time, space, and speed possible – and visible.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, interwar photographic practices are inextricable from the turn-of-the-century scientific, medical, and aesthetic discourses of visual knowledge that are themselves intimately interrelated. Scientific uses of photography developed a new perceptual “norm” while innovating and stretching the boundaries of what perception could be. This resulted in a complex relationship between normative (that which could be aligned with mimetic visual representation, “empiricism,” and conservatism) and non-normative perceptual projects of interwar photography.

The interwar period of German art is further marked by the resurgence of the portrait in both photography and painting. For photography to return to the portrait is for it simply to return to its roots: the first form of accessible photography to “conque[r] the field” was the visiting card – a portable portrait.<sup>91</sup> But this “return” to an older mode of representation in the experimental Weimar era *is* marked by a specific shift, as the portrait is undeniably altered by desires for a “new vision”<sup>92</sup> championed by photographic practices of the time. As I will consider in this chapter, such a “new vision” attempted to communicate by defamiliarizing, teaching something about the world and our engagement with it precisely by abstracting it into something differently tangible and legible. The “new vision” is primarily disorienting and, subsequently, distorting, but this process of visual disorientation is not performed in the name of absurdism or arbitrary aesthetic value. Instead, the “new vision” in Weimar photography constitutes a new attempt to engage with that which exists beyond normative human perception and

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<sup>90</sup> Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” translated by Stanley Mitchell, *Screen* 13, no. 1 (March 1972): 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>92</sup> This is the namesake for a specific faction of photographic practice popular during the 1920s, “*Neues Sehen*.”

attempts to communicate that in a more “objective” fashion. *Neues Sehen* photography is thus equally aesthetic and epistemological in scope and equally experimental and didactic in practice. No longer merely reproductive, photography itself became generative and instructive. Artists embraced the “new vision” of photography as a means with which to hone and “purify” visual perception to transcend the flawed limits of human cognition. However, this latent didacticism could be seen as extending into the realm of degeneracy theory through fortifying the role of the body as a social heuristic, a practice theretofore established by the traditions of anthropometry, physiognomy, and phrenology. Even among avant-garde and leftist artists, there was the danger that this didacticism and language of “purity” or “clarity” could evoke hygienic and eugenic rhetorics, further blurring the lines between aesthetic and political discourses.

While “new vision” photography appears to sustain the era’s ideal of representation as “empirical” knowledge to be decoded by the camera, it nonetheless troubles mimetic objectivity through its own distortions. Mimeticism ultimately constitutes a broader discussion about systems of normative representation in which divergences and distortions are often repressed. It is the *efficacy* of mimetic representation that marks it as mimetic. In other words, mimesis functions rhetorically: mimesis convinces a viewer of the authenticity, truth, or “empirical” objectivity of its own representation based on verisimilitude. On the other hand, while the “clarity of its means” belies a mimetic (or indexical) relationship between presentation and representation, photography in the hands of *Neues Sehen* practitioners and photomonteurs dispenses with the Cartesian space integral to mimesis to communicate in a new way altogether. As photomonteur Raoul Hausmann wrote in 1931,

In the photomontage of the future, the exactness of the material, the clear particularity of objects, and the precision of plastic concepts will play the greatest role, *despite or because of their mutual juxtaposition*...One might say that like photography and the silent film, photomontage can contribute a great deal to the *education of our vision*, to our *knowledge of optical, psychological, and social structures*; it can do so thanks to *the clarity of its means*, in which content and form, meaning and design, become one.<sup>93</sup>

Though the language of unifying form and function evokes the total schema of conventional aesthetics, Hausmann described photomontage as using mimetic representation (photography) to extend *beyond* a mimetic paradigm of space and signification. Photomontage can remain formally figurative while conceptually abstract, and the tension between these modes is precisely what “educates” the viewers’ and artists’ visions. This juxtaposition of concept, image, and space is didactic, as it instructs viewers on the new possibilities of form and recombinant potentials of conventional aesthetic modes of representation. Hand in hand with the disorientation of modernist “new vision” photography, photomontage constituted a new anti-aesthetic epistemology of the visual insofar as it focused on the fragmentary and partial nature of representation rather than an ideal cohesion of space and form.

Conversely, as discussed in the boxer sequence of *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* in chapter one, the totalizing, didactic logic of physiognomy remains latent in much of Weimar visual culture and provide viewers with implicit, “instinctual” instruction. As Richard Gray writes in *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz*,

[i]ndeed, physiognomics takes on the character of a super-discipline [in the Weimar Republic]. *It is hypostatized as a universal theory of knowledge, perception, and instinctual understanding* that presents a powerful counter-model

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<sup>93</sup> Emphasis is my own. Raoul Hausmann, “Fotomontage,” trans. Joel Agee, reproduced in *Photomontage Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2012), 116.

to the Enlightenment narrative of a rationally endowed, historically progressive humanity.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, Walter Benjamin wrote some seventy-three years earlier that, “[s]hifts in power, to which we are now accustomed, make the *training* and *sharpening* of a physiognomic awareness into a *necessity*. Whether one is of the right or the left, one will have to get used to being seen in terms of one’s provenance.”<sup>95</sup> While we can now read this statement as sinisterly premonitory, it effectively demonstrates the ubiquity of a physiognomic approach to Weimar art and media even then. As a “super-discipline,” physiognomy is indeed inextricable from the period and its visual culture – even that which does not appear to engage with it in any way. In the discussion that follows, I argue that the mode of the portrait is still tethered to physiognomy’s legacy and reach during the Weimar period, as portraiture depends on physiognomy’s “method” to instruct its viewers on degrees of difference among its subjects. Portraiture maintains the face’s role as a social heuristic, a function of faciality elaborated by physiognomy, criminology, and race science of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.

In Weimar photography, the face as social heuristic is celebrated in typology, deconstructed in photomontage, and complicated by the filmic face. In the hands of “new vision” photography that challenges the sovereignty of beauty, the mode of the portrait undergoes a drastic transformation from index to icon – from appropriation to approximation. Whereas the index, the usual state of the photographic image, depends on its contiguity with its object, the icon instead presents only similarity. If “[t]he mode of representation (mimetic) is what it invested with authenticity and uniqueness through the

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<sup>94</sup> Emphasis is my own. Gray, *About Face*, 181.

<sup>95</sup> Emphasis is my own. Benjamin, “Short History,” 22.

portrait,”<sup>96</sup> the “new vision” portrait (and photomontage that accompanied it) divests the body and the face of their particularity. As such, the body and the face serve as the primary objects and points of departure for this chapter, through which I hope to delve into several formal, ideological, and conceptual tensions in interwar photography. The analysis that follows will first explore these tensions through the distinct but interrelated modes of the filmic facial portrait here represented in the photographic work of Helmar Lerski and the “documentary” portraits of August Sander while situating each among the contemporaneous discourses of photographic distortion and photomontage.

### **Distorted Bodies, Degenerate Bodies?**

Alongside concerted efforts by both scientists and artists to analyze the image and visual perception, “new vision” artists of the Weimar period often attempted to instead deconstruct human perceptual altogether through practices of photographic prosthesis.<sup>97</sup>

In particular, László Moholy-Nagy’s 1925 modernist treatise *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*

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<sup>96</sup>Ernst van Alphen, “The Portrait’s Dispersal,” *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>97</sup> In France, physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotographic locomotion studies used the camera to remove the taint of a human practitioner or technician. The images, which depended on a language of illuminated lines and dots used to register physical motion, were increasingly abstract. As Marey further articulated his system of technical abstraction, the body was gradually effaced and more or less removed from the picture plane. The body’s image alone was of no immediate consequence to Marey, as it did not show anything heretofore unseen. As Joshua Ellenbogen writes, “One can go as far as to say that, in Marey’s hands, the basic identity of photography underwent alteration, in that it ceased to function as a reproductive technology...” Ellenbogen identifies Marey’s project as “an archetypal instance of ‘mechanical objectivity,’” since Marey produced (rather than reproduced) representational indices without concrete referent. Ellenbogen, “Camera and Mind,” 88-104. Marey’s wide-ranging impact on interwar German photography and its theory is also palpable, as both László Moholy-Nagy and Walter Benjamin allude to Marey’s work. Benjamin writes in his “brief history” of photography that “[i]t is possible, for example, however roughly, to describe the way somebody walks, but it is impossible to say anything about that fraction of a second when a person starts to walk. Photography with its various aids (lenses, enlargements) can reveal this moment.” Benjamin, “Short History,” 7. Also important to note is the reciprocal influence Marey and British photographer Eadweard Muybridge had on one another. In the 1870s, Muybridge used photography to study the locomotion of horses, leading to the development of the “zoopraxiscope,” an early animation device and important predecessor to the film projector. After returning from a visit to Marey’s studio, Muybridge expanded his studies to include different kinds of animals as well as athletes.

(“Painting, Photography, Film”) advocates for a distorting and fragmenting art anathema to the formal integrity and idealism expounded through *Körperkultur* as discussed in chapter one and the later conservative realism of the “Third Reich.” In the case of photography, he writes that totality is not the goal. Despite the influence of Marey’s “mechanical objectivity” on his language, Moholy-Nagy seeks an “objectivity” that is neither fully removed from human perception nor exclusively productive rather than reproductive. Instead of interrogating the invisible world to reveal a hidden totality, Moholy-Nagy believes that photography is capable of “arresting fragments” and providing new (yet limited) access to that which goes unseen in human perception: “Nor should we regard the ability of the lens to distort – the view from below, from above, the oblique view – as in any sense merely negative, for *it provides an impartial approach*, such as our eyes, tied as they are to the laws of association, do not give...”<sup>98</sup> In “*Wohin geht die photographische Entwicklung?*” (“What Direction is Photography Headed?”), a short article published in a 1931 issue of the photographic trade journal *Photo-Börse*, Moholy-Nagy again praises the “distortive possibilities of the camera lens” [*Verzerrsmöglichkeiten des Objektivs*].<sup>99</sup> He contends that what was once seen as an error or mistake could in fact be educational insofar as it approaches a more “objective” visual knowledge. Moholy-Nagy bravely instructs a new generation of photographers that too much shadow, uncanny off-center angles and perspectives, even negative images themselves are “no longer to be understood negatively.” While it is not the first time Moholy-Nagy champions the use of distorting techniques in modernist photography (as we have seen above, the same wording can be found in his 1925 treatise *Painting*,

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<sup>98</sup> Emphasis is my own. Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, 7.

<sup>99</sup> László Moholy-Nagy, “*Wohin geht die photographische Entwicklung?*” *Photo-Börse* no. 10 (October 1, 1932), 305-306.

*Photography, Film*), here he makes this point for a more general audience of amateurs, technicians and photochemical enthusiasts. The media theorist and artist radically embraces the distortion of perspective in photography as more accurately representative of the way(s) that objects exist in the world and the “visions” that are merely inaccessible to the human instrument, the body.

However, in his 1925 treatise, Moholy-Nagy rejects the idea that painting could pursue a “new vision” or project an alternative perception: he describes photography as providing “an expressional means for representation” that makes representational painting obsolete (at least, in the pursuit of a non-objective “absolute painting”). Moholy-Nagy sees the painter’s pursuit of non-objective perception as a lack of “scientific knowledge” on par with that of the “unimaginative’ technician” and a glaring insult to desired progress in the field of optics.<sup>100</sup> He further undermines previous attempts at visual communication as flawed and ineffectual:

One man invents printing with moveable type, another photography, a third screen-printing and stereotype, the next electrotpe, phototype, the celluloid plate hardened by light. Men still kill one another, they have not yet understood how they live, why they live; politicians fail to observe that the earth is an entity, yet television has been invented: the “Far Seer”—tomorrow we shall be able to look in the heart of our fellow-man, be everywhere and yet be alone; illustrated books, newspapers, magazines are printed—in millions. The unambiguousness of the real, the truth in the everyday situation is there for all classes. *The hygiene of the optical, the health of the visible is slowly filtering through.*<sup>101</sup>

Though his language is tainted by both an overwhelming sense of righteous empiricism and utopianism, his project remains distinct from that of Marey’s or more conservative approaches to visual knowledge. The new vision Moholy-Nagy expounds is described

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<sup>100</sup> Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, 29.

<sup>101</sup>Emphasis is Moholy-Nagy’s. László Moholy-Nagy, “Typophoto,” trans. Janet Seligman, in *Photomontage Between the Wars: 1918-1939*, 110.



**Figure 24 :** Moholy-Nagy produced photographic portraits under the tutelage of his then wife, Lucia Moholy. Despite his theoretical understanding of the medium, Moholy-Nagy was not trained as a photographer and often depended on Lucia to pose, develop, and print “his” images. László Moholy-Nagy, *Lucia*, gelatin silver print, 1924-28. © Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed through Artstor public collections, CC0)



as something more holistically engaging with the world. It is not merely an essentializing tendency to approach and document the unknown. Rather, through aesthetic dis-orientation and distortion, the unknown is made known to us without configuring it into more “legible” forms. Despite his aversion to representational painting (which is “non-objective” insofar as it pursues form, the realm of photographic machines) and the painted portrait,

he praises photographic portraiture in a later exhibition text. In “The Future of the Photographic Process,” the text that accompanied the 1927 *Film und Foto* exhibition, Moholy-Nagy writes that the “future” in question includes “objective but *also* expressive portraits” and “weird combinations of the most realistic, imitative means which pass into imaginary spheres. They can, however...tell a story; *more veristic than ‘life itself’*.”<sup>102</sup>

Emphasis on the “weird,” the “imaginary,” and “expressive” qualities of such photographic portraits suggest they run counter to the “documentary” and typologizing portraits of Moholy-Nagy’s day and instead engage with an anti-aesthetic and the affective qualities of Expressionism. His call for a portraiture “more veristic than life itself” also implies the presence of an excess of experience that cannot be accounted for in the single, “whole” image and instead splinters into photographic or filmic fragments.

<sup>102</sup> Emphases are my own. Moholy-Nagy, “The Future of the Photographic Process,” trans. Janet Seligman, in *Photomontage Between the Wars: 1918-1939*, 110.

The angular shapes, harsh shadows, and ambiguous forms one finds in Moholy-Nagy's sculpture or print work emerge in his photographs as disarticulating devices (Figure 24). But beyond the desired abnormality of his subjects (which recalls Paul Schultze-Naumburg's proclamations that the socially and physically degenerate had been reified and canonized by modern art), Moholy-Nagy's photographic theory and portraiture alike are indebted to another modernist medium, redirecting their viewers to the visual language of cinema.

### **The Face in Film and Photomontage**

The body and the face become some of the most potently mobile (and mobilizing) images of this period. Regardless of method or form of expression, we can understand the image of the face as taking on a specific semiotic weight. There is no denying the face's signifying significance, as the face remains the primary locus of communication in the human image; despite its theorization as distinct from the body (and the dualism etched into the aesthetic and critical traditions between mind and body, the masculine intellect and the feminine face), the communication of the face ultimately transcends the communication of the body in the still image.

Through the visual language of Weimar cinema, the face is ultimately dislocated from the body, resulting in the facial close-up. The close-up is used to great effect in many key Weimar films, including Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt* (1927), Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), and seen earlier in Expressionist films like Robert Reinert's *Nerven* (1919) and Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920). Form follows function in terms of shot length: close up is affective, while

medium or long shots are distanced, observational. While the close-up functions technically to achieve focused lighting on the face and better emphasize the figure by removing busy backgrounds, the result is artificial and more closely resembles studio portraiture than a frame of film. In *Dr. Caligari*, figures shot in close-up are seen completely wrenched from the *mise-en-scene* in front of a black backdrop (Figures 26 & 27). In *Metropolis*, Maria is shown among the underground children before a close-up with a soft blur isolates her and her direct gaze at Freder (Figures 29 & 30).

As that which humanizes the technology's animacy and warms the "cold" mimetic nature of photography by imbuing it with a much-needed affect, the facial close-up shot is undeniably a product of a cinematic form of vision. While some films of the period – perhaps most notably Carl Theodor Dreyer's French-language picture, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) – liberally used the close-up to create a claustrophobic or apotheosizing affective ambiance, many German films use the close-up more selectively. In the thoroughly rhythmic and technological Weimar film *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt*, a film full of crowds of figures and types (rather than "characters" or specific persons), the only significant facial close-up is that of a woman on the brink of suicide (Figure 31).

This scene crystallizes national economic anxieties in an individual — and a face. Leading up to this moment, German inflation is transcribed and literalized as a rollercoaster of economic precarity and insecurity that drives one woman to suicide. Close-ups of her face and wide eyes are spliced between images of the choppy water below her, a dizzying, hypnotic spiral and the plummeting rollercoaster. Though it is not shown on screen, we are led to believe she commits herself to death, plunging into the



Clockwise from top left: **Figure 25**: Robert Wiene (dir.), *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), 21:56; **Figure 26**: 22:32; **Figure 27**: 41:48; **Figure 28**: 41:42



**Figure 29**, left: Fritz Land (dir.), *Metropolis* (1927), 11:10  
**Figure 30**, right: *ibid*, 11:18



**Figure 31**, left: Walter Ruttmann (dir.), *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt* (1927), 46:05

**Figure 32**, right: Helmar Lerski, page from *Köpfe des Alltags*, 1931. Image reproduced from Harrison-Hiett listing

water leaving concerned bystanders to peer into the water in her wake. Understanding this figure as representing the embodied experience of German instability, panic, and crisis further fortifies the iconographic tether between the anonymous face and the national body on which *Körperkultur* visual culture and the portrait depend. While called the “symphony of a city,” Ruttmann’s film is ultimately a “portrait” of the synesthetic shock of modern life.

Films from the period like *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt* (1927) and *Menschen am Sonntag* (1930) also represent the reverse, expressing a reciprocal influence of the portrait mode on film. The photographic portrait is repeatedly visualized as an integral part of daily (bourgeois, urban) life, and people having their photo taken are seen in both Weimar films. However, when translated to the medium of film, the photographic portrait becomes an almost claustrophobic, static space compared to its cinematic counterpart. A quintessential *Neue Sachlichkeit* film directed by Robert Siodmak and Edgar Ulmer from a loose script by Kurt Siodmak and Billy Wilder, the

semi-documentary *Menschen am Sonntag* (“People on Sunday”) is itself a dynamic filmic portrait. The film’s subtitle, “a film without actors,” evokes the kind of ambiguous, “objective” perspective of the camera that captures the lives of real people, intimating that the camera is ambulatory and effaces the authorship of the directors.

In its cinematography and editing, *Menschen am Sonntag* emphasizes the experience of its subjects through regular close-ups. Most dialogue is represented by medium-long shots of the group and alternating close-ups of individual heads: a discussion between a couple is shown through with close-up shots of each of their individual heads in profile, and a three-way conversation is depicted by showing each participant’s face in sequence (Figure 34). Special attention is also paid to the role of the photographed face in the form of a series of film star publicity portraits and the proxied presence of their subjects in the relationship of a cohabitating couple (Figure 33). Other scenes are spliced or transitioned through cutting to close-ups of faces, laughing or otherwise emoting, breaking each scene into fragments of a shared experience. Yet



**Figure 33**, left: Robert Siodmak and Edgar Ulmer (dir.), *Menschen am Sonntag* (Berlin: Filmstudio 1929, 1930), 15:22

**Figure 34**, right: *ibid*, 25:02

another scene focuses on groups of lakeside bathers getting their portraits made, alternating between the filmic portrait and the photographic portrait. This sequence first *cinematically* represents the figures (Figure 35) and then cuts to *photographic* portraits of their faces that have been re-filmed and spliced in; the images remain static and in slightly higher contrast, but the light flickers (Figure 36), in some way “animating” the still. The film includes cameos of two famous Weimar German-Jewish performers, Valeska Gert, an actress and *Ausdruckstänzerin* whose portrait is made in this sequence (44:33-44:39), and Kurt Gerron, an actor known from *Variété* (1925), *Der Blaue Engel* (1930), and the 1928 stage production of Bertolt Brecht’s *Dreigroschenoper*, in which he debuted the “*Macky Messer*”-singing role of Tiger Brown.<sup>103</sup> Kurt Gerron was later captured in the Netherlands and interned at Theresienstadt, where he was forced to produce a positive propaganda film regarding the treatment of Jews therein before he was gassed at Birkenau. Along with these Jewish figures and faces that would later be coded as “degenerate,” the portrait sequence includes whimsical portraits that do not enhance or elevate their subjects but rather unflatteringly exaggerate certain features (Figure 38) and border on the comic or grotesque (Figure 37). The film then cuts to a montage of photographic glamor portraits (Figure 39) completely severed in content and context from the lake scene but depending on the referentiality of the bourgeois portrait tradition before returning to playful shots of a family of swimmers.

As in *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt*, the close-up is often contrasted with its other: the crowd shot. The crowd shot is somewhat essential to film and photojournalism:

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<sup>103</sup> Valeska Gert additionally appeared in Expressionist playwright Ernst Toller’s *Die Wandung* (“The Transformation,” 1919), a play about his wartime trauma and the destruction of a nationalist ideal through violence. Additional plays by Toller such as *Winkemann* centralize narratives of disability. Himself Jewish, Toller committed suicide in 1939.

to portray the masses is to present a tightly woven social tapestry rather than a useful record of individuality or prestige (as in the case of an individual portrait). Instead, as seen in *Nerven* (Figure 40), the iconography of the crowd is inextricable from the experience and iconography of (Bolshevik) socialism during the German riots of 1918-1919. The visualization of the crowd-as-mass presents a threat to the dissolution of the individual, bourgeois subject encapsulated in and “preserved” by the conventional portrait.

Fritz Lang’s 1927 science fiction classic, *Metropolis*, provides a shot that is perhaps the most striking example of the dynamic tension between the crowd and the individual face. A tense, fast-paced scene of “Maria” fomenting workers’ insurrection leads to one shot that suddenly encapsulates all their faces simultaneously (Figure 41). The superimposition of different frames replaces the visual logic of the shot reverse-shot editing that precedes it: all at once, the viewer sees the men looking desperately at “Maria” and, in return, sees her face contort and emote exaggeratedly before the false Maria catalyzes the workers to rebel and attack Freder. The false Maria (and, to a lesser degree, Lehrer Johannes in *Nerven*) come to embody the perils of falling prey to nationalistic demagoguery and violent collectivism. This in part muddies the political prerogative of the film as it could be seen as both anti-capitalist and anti-socialist. But what is most fascinating about the crowd scene in *Metropolis* is its resemblance to contemporaneous photomontage. It directs viewers to imagine the haptic, analog processes of both cinema and photomontage, the latter of which is directly evocative of editing and splicing celluloid film. Coupled with the particularity of the scene’s cinematic faciality, the scene almost appears to be a social photomontage.





Clockwise from top left: **Figure 35:** Siodmak and Ulmer, *Menschen am Sonntag*, 44:48; **Figure 36:** 44:50; **Figure 37:** 44:31; **Figure 38:** 45:09



**Figure 39:** *ibid*, 45:52



**Figure 40:** Reinert, *Nerven*, 11:59



**Figure 41:** Lang, *Metropolis*, 1:40:19

The textural mass of the crowd shot appeared both in photomontage and “new vision” photography of the period. Both appear in *Foto-Auge*, the 1929 photobook edited by Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold that belies “new vision” photography’s connections to the techniques of photomontage and cinema as well as cinema’s direct impact on photomontage. Heavily influenced by the photographic and theoretical work of Moholy-Nagy, *Foto-Auge* also marks the beginning of Franz Roh’s most prolific period of artistic photography.<sup>104</sup>

Mass, social communication was of crucial importance and held political power to the leftists of “new vision” photography. Subsequently, *Foto-Auge* was published with its text in triplicate, simultaneously showing translations of captions in German, English, and French on each page with translations of Roh’s introductory essays provided in each language as well. *Foto-Auge* embraces myriad techniques deployed in the name of a new vision including an emphasis on the textural planes rendered abstract through the use of scale only recently made possible by aerial photography, images borne out of “scientific looking” practices like x-rays and a medical photo of a diathermancy therapy session, microphotography, photograms, photomontage, and some works that are not quite

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<sup>104</sup> In the article “Franz Roh and the Art History of Photography,” Pepper Stetler suggests that Roh’s photographic productivity (including *Foto-Auge*) is in fact inextricable from its interwar context, as Roh did not continue his photographic practice following his release from Dachau in 1933. While Roh rarely exhibited his photography prior to his internment, his work as an editor and artist did not go unnoticed: “The catalogue that accompanied [the 1931 exhibition] *Das Lichtbild* identified Roh as a ‘friend to the types of photographs that are today still cast aside as ‘games’: photograms, negative prints, and photomontage.’” Roh and Tschichold included Moholy-Nagy’s work in *Foto-Auge* of 1929 (two photographs, “*Kloake in Paris*” and “*Kahn*,” and a “*Leda*” photomontage). Additionally, Stetler traced Roh’s “photographic turn” to the publication of Moholy-Nagy’s *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* in 1925, which intimates direct continuity between Roh’s “magical realism” art criticism (further discussed in chapter three) and his late 1920s pursuit of a “new vision” through photography. Pepper Stetler, “Franz Roh and the Art History of Photography,” in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, eds., *Object:Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909-1949. An Online Project of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 1.

photographs at all – like a portrait of photomonteur John Heartfield by George Grosz.

While *Foto-Auge* is not dedicated to photomontage, the inclusion of this “portrait” of Heartfield and other examples of photomontage in the collection underline the extreme impact of the technique on photography – and art in general – of the period.

Photomontage replaced abstract photography (or photography that renders commonplace sights abstract through composition and scale, such as Germaine Krull’s

*Schiffsarchitektur* or *Metal* works, or the plant photography of Karl Blossfeldt) around 1924 as the newest “critical” mode of artistic photographic practice challenging the dominance of the mimetic paradigm and styles of photography that merely index it.<sup>105</sup> In this way, representational photomontage turned the index into the icon and the “trace” into the presence of something new altogether.

Photomontage of the period disassembled and reassembled pictorial space, but it also adulterated faciality – though the integrity of faciality is therein made questionable and porous. John Heartfield, one of the leading proponents of photomontage, advocating for his viewers to “*Benütze Foto als Waffe!*,” “Use art as a weapon!” to explode the pictorial plane and its contents.<sup>106</sup> Whereas earlier dadaist photomontage would have stopped here, the new photomontage of the mid-twenties had photomonteurs return to the scene of the crime and stitch them back together with an almost surgical precision. One of the most striking products of this process is not only the renegotiation of the picture plane but of faciality (or the iconicity of the face) itself. Hannah Höch’s 1934 essay on

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<sup>105</sup> *Photomontage Between the Wars: 1918-1939*, 18-19.

<sup>106</sup> This phrase appears as a caption for a spread in *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* 8 featuring images of Heartfield’s rooms at *Film und Foto* (known as “FiFo”) and a self-portrait. Reproduced in *Photomontage Between the Wars: 1918-1939*, 15.

the technique points to the face and the head as the original and primary components of photomontage, returning to the humble, domestic origins of the practice:

The first instances of this form, i.e., the cutting and rejoining of photos or parts of photos, may be found sometimes in the boxes of our grandmothers, in the fading, curious pictures representing this or that great-uncle as a military uniform with a pasted-on head. In those days the head of a person was simply glued onto a preprinted musketeer.<sup>107</sup>

While the body is general, it is not insignificant that the face is conventionally treated as specific and unique – the addition of the loved one’s face turns the common image into a portrait, and the body of the soldier (part of the constitutive force of the national body) is merely a component of the person re-presented through the addition of the face. This small amendment to the picture plane immediately sutures nationalist themes and imagery to personal relationships, once again relying on the flexible metonymy of these two bodies.

Political and avant-garde photomontage in the Weimar period typically appealed to more ambiguous senses of identity and perception, though many critical works by the likes of Hannah Höch and John Heartfield targeted and lambasted specific political figures. *Foto-Auge* notably closes with a Dziga Vertov photomontage (“*dsiga wertoff: fotomontage aus filmstücken [sic]*,” or “photomontage made from pieces of film,” image 76 in the original text<sup>108</sup>), through which Vertov’s broader impact on the *Foto-Auge* project is confirmed. The work included is a static crystallization of the dynamic montage practice of his filmic work. The image directly evokes the imagery and at times

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<sup>107</sup> Hannah Höch, “A Few Words on Photomontage,” 1934, reproduced in *Photomontage Between the Wars: 1918-1939*, 118. This reference to the popular technique’s “secret history” was more recently further excavated by Elizabeth Otto in “The Secret History of Photomontage: On the Origins of the Composite Form and the Weimar Photomontages of Marianne Brandt,” in *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects: Rethinking the Political Culture of Germany in the 1920s*, edited by Kathleen Canning et. al, Berghahn Books (New York, New York: 2010), 66-91.

<sup>108</sup> Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, ed., *Foto-Auge* (Tübingen: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1973; original 1929), 93.

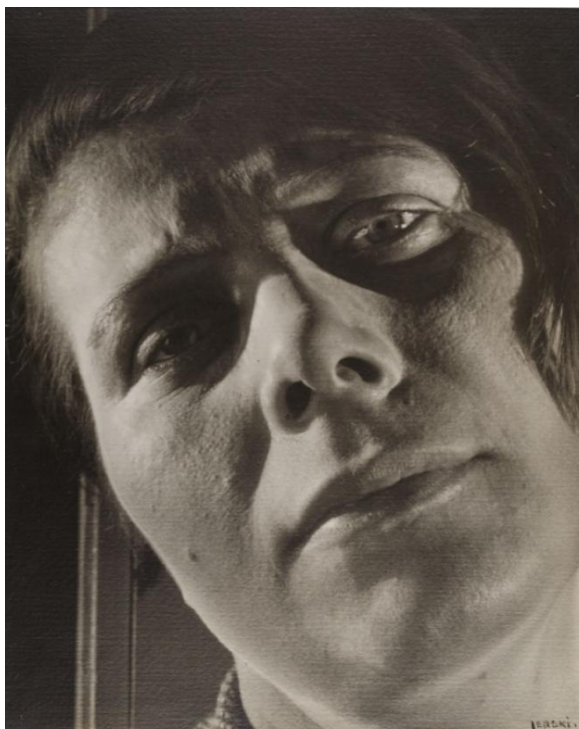
ambiguous narrative of *Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov's 1929 "documentary" that remains one of the most influential works of experimental cinema and is itself an attempt at a functional "international" visual language without narrative conventions or subtitles. The photobook's title, *Foto-Auge*, even recalls a still from the film itself (Figure 43) and Vertov's earlier title, *Kino-Eye* [*sic*]. Filmic montage is here "translated" to the page as a vertical stack of still images that imply a narrative sequence from top to bottom. Roh's own Leica band negative images (reproduced in *Foto-Auge* in negative, images 64-65 in the original text) draw on a similar organization for effect, urging readers to intuit the implicit, cinematic logic therein that perhaps underlies much of Weimar photomontage practice.<sup>109</sup>

### Helmar Lerski and the "Anonymous" Portrait

In photographic portraiture, cinematic framing and techniques are perhaps most frequently encountered in the interwar work of photographer Helmar Lerski, whose own experiences as an actor, camera man (*Nerven*), and special effects director (*Metropolis*)

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<sup>109</sup> As mentioned in note 104, Roh did not maintain a photographic practice after 1933. Instead, he returned to photomontage. In a 1935 photomontage, "*Der Exoticismus wird beschossen*" ("Exoticism is fired upon"), Roh implicitly draws an analogy between the physical difference of subjects considered degenerate (here what appears to be the head of an indigenous person (perhaps a South American, South Pacific, or Indonesian individual) and post-Expressionist art. This photomontage serves as both a socio-political and aesthetic critique: Roh refers to post-Expressionist art as drawing on "exoticism" (primitivism, naïve art, and more) in *Nach-Expressionismus*; in the photomontage, the indigenous person's head is constructed in metonymic relationship to post-Expressionist art. The photomontage crystallizes the "threat" of racial and bodily difference with laughing, cut-out head baring sharpened teeth while also using this as an allegory for the treatment of post-Expressionist art under Nazi rule following 1933: this encounter between walruses (perhaps stand-ins for bloated Nazi bureaucrats) and an indigenous person come to reflect a broader confrontation between the artistic left and the conservative reigning right. Further, it's possible that Roh more specifically alludes here to artists like Henri Rousseau, whose work often fantasized exotic Pre-Columbian scenes and was a favorite of Roh's, and George Grosz. Rousseau's work is included in *Nach-Expressionismus*, and Roh wrote about Rousseau at length in a 1927 article, "*Henri Rousseaus Bildform und Bedeutung für die Gegenwart*" ("Henri Rousseau's Images and Significance for the Present") in *Die Kunst für Alle: Malerei, Plastik, Graphik, Architektur* no. 42 (1926-1927): 105-114. George Grosz's 1921 *Das Gesicht der Herrschenden Klasse* notably features a walrus-faced Nazi in the image "*Volkes Stimme ist Gottes Stimme*." For more on the role of indigeneity in interwar German art, see note 194 on "Indianthusiasm" in the work of Otto Dix.



**Figure 42:** Helmar Lerski, “Hausangestellte,” gelatin silver print from *Köpfe des Alltags: Unbekannten Menschen* (Berlin: Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1931), 72. © Nachlass Helmar Lerski, Museum Folkwang, Essen

shaped the tight compositions of his oeuvre.<sup>110</sup> After returning to photography from film and producing celebrity portraits, Lerski turned to “sozialdokumentarische[n] *Bildnisfotographie*” (“social documentary portrait photography”). Lerski’s 1931 photobook, *Köpfe des Alltags*, uses facial closeups and expressionistic lighting to highlight the sheer variety and range of human emotion embedded in the face (Figure 42). These “documentary” portraits differ

greatly from those of his contemporaries like August Sander, however: if Sander’s photography represented a desire to systematize and organize *types* of human experience, Lerski’s work instead embraces the anonymity of his subjects and only identifies them by their trade (or lack thereof).

The titular heads of *Köpfe des Alltags* are “written” in a visual language belonging to film and embedded in an intermedial dialogue. *Köpfe des Alltags* plays on types without falling prey to a systematizing impulse and instead produces thoroughly

<sup>110</sup> Duttlinger, “Helmar Lerski’s Dramaturgy of the Face,” 229. Silent German films Lerski worked on include Robert Reinert’s *Nerven* (1919, see discussion in chapter one), Reinert’s *Opium* of the same year, Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), and Arnold Fanck’s *Das heilige Berg* (1926). Lerski additionally worked on two other Reinert pictures, *Sterbende Völker* (1922) and *Wenn Tote Sprechen* (1917). Lerski was also a Zionist Jew who moved to Israel shortly after the “Third Reich” took power, where he also directed a documentary film in 1935.

cinematic portraits. Lerski gives precedence to affect, imbuing each image with (presumably staged) drama through expressionistic lighting and tight crops. The book doesn't represent a group of figures but rather a cast of players. Carolin Duttlinger describes this effect as such: "the core paradigm of Lerski's work is not realism but theatricality. His portraits evoke an archive of roles and faces, from the dictator to the revolutionary, which are rooted in painting and theater and are now adopted by the technical media."<sup>111</sup> Lerski's work destabilizes the sense of individual identity retained in the work of typologizing interwar portrait photographers like August Sander. While *Köpfe des Alltags*'s table of contents identifies its subjects by their jobs, the book doesn't name individuals but rather presents a cross-section of the urban poor still considered undesirable such as domestic workers, physical laborers, and beggars (members of the *Lumpenproletariat*, per Marx). While "labeled," the figures remain otherwise anonymous due to their socially marginal positions; this is further emphasized by the book's subtitle of "*unbekannte Menschen*," "unknown persons."

The images appear candid and blur the lines between the modes of cinema, portrait photography, and photojournalism. This can be understood as intentional insofar as the images and their subjects are altogether indeterminate, "unknown." For the most part, sitters avoid the camera's gaze or avert their eyes, though a housemaid defiantly returns the camera's gaze (Figure 42). In their anonymity, Lerski's sitters emerge as "ensemble" actors of German society, but, as subjects as from the "*Unterschicht*,"<sup>112</sup> they remain social others who might otherwise exist outside the purview of bourgeois

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<sup>111</sup> Duttlinger, "Helmar Lerski's Dramaturgy of the Face," 239.

<sup>112</sup> I have borrowed the language of "*Unterschicht*" from Peter Pfrunder of the Fotostiftung Schweiz here. Peter Pfrunder, "Helmar Lerski: Metamorphose," *Fotostiftung Schweiz*. Webpage.



honorific photographic portraiture. Though defined in space, Lerski's subjects are cropped and carved up into distinct planes and lines by the harsh light that both illuminates and fragments them.

Lerski's later series, *Metamorphose: Verwandlungen durch Licht* ("Metamorphoses: Transformations through Light"), similarly resists any "fixing" of the face by the photographic mode. Siegfried Kracauer's brief discussion of this series in his 1960 *Theory of Film* recalls Benjamin's 1931 earlier essay, "A Short History of Photography," which discusses the "physiognomic qualities" of Sander's work. Kracauer's language, however, better situates Lerski's oeuvre among "new vision" projects:

Lerski took over a hundred pictures of that [young man from Palestine's] face from a very short distance, each time subtly changing the lights with the aid of screens. Big close-ups, these pictures detailed the texture of the skin so that cheeks and brows turned into a maze of inscrutable runes reminiscent of soil formations, as they appear from an airplane...None of the photographs recalled the model; and all of them differed from each other. Out of the original face there arose, evoked by varying lights, a hundred different faces...<sup>113</sup>

Kracauer uses Lerski's photography as an example of the transformative power of lighting in film, though he does not address the distinctions or similarities between the two media. His description describes the tension (or ambiguity) of scale and detail ("big close-ups" that also evoke the textured planes of aerial photography) seen earlier in *Köpfe des Alltags* while focusing on Lerski's life-long interest in the face as form rather than social index. As "inscrutable runes," the details and compositions of Lerski's "portraits" resist the conventional function of portraiture to convey identity and individuality. These portraits are neither forms of bureaucratic documentation nor testaments to bourgeois

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<sup>113</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 162.

subjectivity, but instead emerge as encounters with true, unknown others who appear all at once as specific subjects and part of a larger, undifferentiated mass. Lerski's sitters remain "visible" and yet obscured, individual and yet indeterminate.

Lerski's oeuvre exists at odds with the "sticky atmosphere" of conventional portrait photography at the turn of the century described by Walter Benjamin in his "*kleine Geschichte*" and emphasized in *Menschen am Sonntag*. However, Benjamin claims the (close-up) faces found in the films of Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin were *not* portraits insofar as the bodies within them were not being photographed for their own purposes: they had "no interest in being photographed" and were thus distinct from the sitters for conventional bourgeois portraits.<sup>114</sup> This complicates the notion of the portrait, as Benjamin is exclusively referring to it as a commercial and personal experience, whereas the faces in film or photobooks are "democratized" and "belong" to a mass viewership. In this sense, Lerski is *not* a portraitist, but rather a part of the filmic apparatus to which Benjamin ascribes collective potential. Even Lerski's documentary project positions himself as a subjective lens (or a viewer) rather than an artist approaching objective representation, as the cover to *Köpfe des Alltags* lists "*gesehen von Helmar Lerski*" instead of simply "*von*."<sup>115</sup>

Lerski's work resonates not only with Kracauer's mid-century criticism but also with the annals of interwar film theory such as that found in the early work of Béla

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<sup>114</sup> Benjamin, "Short History," 21. Kracauer's piece on Lerski echoes this sentiment, as he suggests they may not even be considered portraits. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 162.

<sup>115</sup> Again, the book describes its images as "seen" by Lerski instead of the more authorial "by" him. Along with Werner Gräff's *Es kommt der neue Fotograf*, one of the catalogs for the *Film und Foto Ausstellung, Köpfe des Alltags* was marketed as a "document of the new vision" by its publisher, Herman Reckendorf Verlag. Covers of both are reproduced on the back cover of the 1931 *Fotomontage* exhibition catalog, itself reproduced in *Photomontage Between the Wars: 1918-1939*, 125-156.

Balázs. Balázs writes of the face, “in this interplay of facial expressions, we witness a struggle between the type and the personality, between inherited and acquired characteristics...to see [the deepest secrets of the inner life] is as exciting as the vivisection of a heartbeat.”<sup>116</sup> In the cinematic portrait, the face represents a dialectic tension between individuality and collectivity. But Lerski wields this tension more dramatically than August Sander by deviating from strictly mimetic representation that embeds and reproduces the subjectivity of its object. If, per Balázs, “[i]n film, everything internal becomes visible in something external; it follows that everything external testifies to an internal reality. This includes beauty,”<sup>117</sup> then this must also apply to the effects of distortion and its internal, external, physical, and social symmetries. Rather than depend on essential beauty or narrative, Lerski’s shots use the face as the locus of affective signification *and* expressionistic lighting to distort the face in the service of communicating something ambiguous about the lives of their subjects.

As nameless (“unknown”) persons, Lerski’s subjects remain part of a general, unidentified social mass while resisting subsumption into generic “types.” *Köpfe des Alltags* ultimately resists the compensatory typologizing impulse to which the work of August Sander falls prey. As Richard Gray writes of Sander’s relation to Weimar race science and physiognomics,

Kassner’s physiognomic theory emerges in other words, out of fear of the *nameless*, classless indistinction of modern cosmopolitan human beings. It is this same fear, of course, that produced typological inventories such as August Sander’s (1876-1964) monumental photographic inventory *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of the time, 1929), and nourished *völkisch* ideologies in this same period, giving

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<sup>116</sup> Béla Balázs, “Soul and Destiny,” in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 31.

<sup>117</sup> Balázs, “On Beauty,” in *Béla Balázs*, 29.

rise to the clarity – to the false and misanthropic clarity – of racial physiognomics.<sup>118</sup>

As *Körperkultur* emerged to “remedy” the physical, bodily trauma made visible by World War I, so, too, did the typology approach its apex in the interwar period as a tool with which to stabilize post 1918-1919 anxieties about the political, social, and national threat of the unidentified social mass. In the following section, I will consider the photographer August Sander’s position between “new vision” and “new objectivity” photography, his treatment of disabled and degenerate subjects, and the unintended consequences of his typological work.

### **August Sander and the Typological Impulse**

To begin discussing the photographic work of August Sander, I must first broach the essential tension that emerges between “*Neue Sachlichkeit*” and “*Neues Sehen*” photographic projects – which have been summarized in the photographic theory of Moholy-Nagy as “reactionary” (or conservative) and “distorting,” respectfully. *Neue Sachlichkeit* and *Neues Sehen* are not polarized categories, as each exerted a reciprocal relation on the other throughout the interwar period. In a 1931 article about photography (presumably referring to what we now call *Neues Sehen*), Erich Sigwart describes *Neues Sehen* as new “direction” on old terrain that made what was “natural” or “obvious” in the past instead foreign and different:

*Der neue Zug hat auch in die Photographie Eingang gefunden. Was wir nie für möglich hielten, was unser Auge einfach nie sah, weil es vom vielend Schauen und Sehen ermüdet und abgestumpft war, das wird heute als neues Evangelium....Ausweg aus diesem Dilemma zu finden, wurde das Schlagwort der ‘Neuen Sachlichkeit’ geprägt und das Problem vom ‘neuen Sehen’ aufgerollt... Wenn nun neuerdings scheinbar Anzeichen dafür sprechen, das seine*

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<sup>118</sup> Emphasis is my own. Gray, *About Face*, 205.

*‘allgemeine Abkehr’ von der neuen Sachlichkeit stattfinde und wenn diese ‘Anzeichen’ von allzu konservativ Gesinnten freudig begrüßt werden, so ist diese Annahme doch nur ein Trugschluss. Das, was als ‘Abkehr’ beurteilt wird, ist nichts anderes als ein Gärungs-, sagen wir ein Reinigungsprozess, der notwendig eintreten muss.... Das Ding ist Nebensache; nicht ‘Was?’, sondern ‘Wie?’<sup>119</sup>*

Sighart describes the projects of *Neues Sehen* and *Neues Sachlichkeit* as “nothing other than a process of fermentation” and “purification,” bringing to mind László Moholy-Nagy’s writings on the “hygiene” of the optically pure while providing a rich metaphor that alludes to the chemistry implicit in photographic practice. Just as there are semantic and conceptual tensions between the two factions of *neue Sachlichkeit* and *neues Sehen*, there are similarly tensions in Sander’s oeuvre that belie his position caught between the projects of a “new objectivity” and a “new vision.” In the mid-1920s, Sander was also working on a series that more radically embraced the idea of the camera’s “new vision” and prosthetic reach entitled “Organic and Inorganic Tools of Man.” In the unpublished series of photographs, he used new material and cropped and enlarged older negatives (Figure 44, “edit[ing] his archive”<sup>120</sup>), experimenting with magnified body parts in a play on the camera’s own prosthetic vision.

Like avant-garde photography enthusiasts, Sander promoted the idea that photography and its scientific reach had emerged as a new form of visual literacy, a universal “chemical-optical physical” *Weltsprache*. In a 1931 radio lecture, “*Die Photographie als Weltsprache*,” Sander famously stated, “*Keine Sprache der Erde*

<sup>119</sup> Emphasis (bold) is my own. Erich Sighart, “*Die neue Richtung*,” *Photo-Börse* 1 no. 2 (February 1, 1932):47-49.

<sup>120</sup> The Metropolitan Museum references the August Sander Archives to validate this series’ existence: “For the series Sander made close-up studies of facial features and certain parts of the body. He also recycled old negatives by cropping and enlarging individual details in the darkroom. In effect, he edited his archive – and, by extension, the human body – in an effort to define and classify types.” “Eye of an Eighteen Year Old Man – August Sander.” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Webpage.

vermag eine so allgemeine verständliche Sprache zu sprechen, wie die Photographie, vorausgesetzt, dass wir den chemischen-optischen-physikalischen Weg zum Wahrheitsbeweis genau einhalten und die Physiognomik beherrschen.”<sup>121</sup> Sander saw the pedagogical potential of photography as unparalleled, particularly in its capacity to “master physiognomy.” Additionally, he approached the matter of detail like a proponent of *Neues Sehen*: despite the introduction of the first modern small-format camera, the Leica first sold to the public in 1925, Sander continued to use a large-format camera with longer exposure times and heavy glass plates. This enabled him to produce extreme detail, like those which Benjamin described as the “physiognomic aspects...which live in the smallest things,” in his prints.<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, *Antlitz der Zeit* challenges neither the specular order nor mimesis in the way the *Neues Sehen* projects Benjamin describes elsewhere in the article do.



**Figure 43**, left: Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Camera*, 1929, 1:06:35

**Figure 44**, right: August Sander, “*Auge eins 18 jähr. jungen Mannes*,” gelatin silver print, 1925-26. © Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne / ARS, NY, 2019

<sup>121</sup> August Sander, “*Wesen und Werden der Photographie: Die Photographie als Weltsprache*,” radio lecture, 1931, from the Dokument Rewe-Bibliothek in the Photographische Sammlung, SK Stiftung Kultur-August Sander Archiv, Cologne, as quoted in Katja Hoffmann, *Ausstellungen als Wissensordnungen: Zur Transformation des Kunstbegriffs auf der Documenta 11* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 330.

<sup>122</sup> Benjamin, “Short History,” 7.

By producing a typological “portrait” of the people of Germany, August Sander relents to a pathologizing paradigm that searches for meaning in the reproduction of the figure or image at large. Despite this, August Sander's massive and unfinished “documentary” project, *Antlitz der Zeit* (“The Face of Our Time”<sup>123</sup>), is one of the most compelling collections of interwar portrait photography to implement the face and body as social heuristics. *Antlitz der Zeit* represents the first sixty photographs of a massive, unfinished series called *People of the Twentieth Century*. Through this series, Sander aspired to comprehensively document the German *Volk*. While serving as a medical intern and photographer's assistant during the war, he began to document different cross-sections of Weimar society after joining the Cologne Progressives and various workers' movements. A 1929 publication featuring these images, *Antlitz der Zeit*, included a preface written by Jewish author Alfred Döblin but was pulled from circulation in 1936. As Yvonne Kalmus writes, “its plates and all available copies” were seized and destroyed by the publisher, “lest they reveal the lie in the ideal of the racially perfect German face and form.”<sup>124</sup> *Antlitz der Zeit* remains an ambitious – if not somewhat utopian – project, though Sander's deference to a problematic system of classification based on Oswald

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<sup>123</sup> In *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz*, Richard T. Gray notes that Rudolf Kassner's physiognomic writings from the interwar period emphasized the distinction between “*Gesicht*,” the conventional but ambiguous word for face, and “*Antlitz*,” “visage” or “countenance” as both embedded within the Christian tradition and more popular in earlier physiognomic theory. Perhaps the use of “*Antlitz*” in Sander's work intends to distance Sander's typological project from thought of the Weimar conservative revolution represented by Kassner's ilk. Alternatively, it could address the collective “demeanor” of a people (*Volk*) or series of types rather than an individual physiognomy. Gray, *About Face*, 201.

<sup>124</sup> Although Sander's title was not on the official lists of “*schädlichen und unerwünschten Literatur*,” correspondence at the publishing house indicates that the Reichskulturkammer confiscated it in 1936. Hannah Shaw complicates the idea of why the title was confiscated, arguing that it could have been Alfred Döblin's preface that irritated the Reichskulturkammer more than the photographs. See also Hannah Shaw “The Trouble with the Censorship of August Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit*,” *PhotoResearcher* no. 31 (2019): 193-206. Yvonne Kalmus, “The Genius of August Sander, 1904-1959,” *Popular Photography* 88 no. 3 (March 1981): 14.

Spengler's organization of developed civilizations has not gone unnoticed.<sup>125</sup> Though *Antlitz der Zeit* attempts an "objective" documentation of social conditions, one could argue it instead re-produces the social stratification it allegedly questions. As Germanist Kathryn Steinbock writes,

[t]hat they embody two contradictory drives points to a fundamental tension of photographic portrait typologies: on the one hand they represent the technical and conceptual modernization of traditional portraiture and a move away from tropes of 19th century bourgeois self-glorification. On the other hand, they appear to venerate older models of stable and coherent identities.<sup>126</sup>

Much of *Antlitz der Zeit* retains standard poses and compositions of portraiture: the images predominantly feature (male) subjects seated or featured with the tools of their trade. They are often either standing or posed and cropped to three-quarter length, and typically address the camera and the viewer. This "conventionality" is part of what fuels the project's *Neue Sachlichkeit* label.

Many *Neue Sachlichkeit* works in painting and photography remain "portraits" insofar as they take the body as their primary object, but, in other examples, some *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix go as far as to invert the functions of physiognomy and phrenology, turning these methods back on their perpetrators. This subversion of the bureaucratic typologizing apparatus that was normally wielded to surveil and subsequently sanitize the *Volkskörper* instead reveals the Weimar bourgeoisie to be the criminals, the deranged, and the greedy. The often visually-suppressed victims of material and institutional violence like the disabled, non-normatively embodied, and

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<sup>125</sup> George Baker has identified the clear resonances between Sander's project and the trajectories of different (Western) societies in the work of Oswald Spengler. Spengler is mentioned in this thesis' introduction as part of the German intellectual tradition influenced by Bénédict Morel (see page 8). While Spengler is not an overt racial hygienist, he advocates for "racial *Lebensraum*" in *Das Untergang des Abendlandes* ("The Decline of the West").

<sup>126</sup> Kathryn Steinbock, *Crisis and Classification: Photographic Portrait Typologies in Early 20th-Century Germany* (Dissertation in Germanic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 2011), 8.



otherwise socially marginal are therein made highly visible. Though the series “*die letzten Menschen*” (“the last people”) of *Antlitz der Zeit* represent this category, they are sequestered to the end as one type, conflating a wide variety of embodiments and abilities (Figure 45) with the recently deceased (Figure 46).<sup>127</sup> Though perhaps inadvertently, this suggests the validity of the period’s eugenicists’ refrain: some lives are unworthy of life (or equal to death, reduced to “matter” and bodies rather than persons).<sup>128</sup> “*Die letzten Menschen*” are those left behind by society at large and left by Sander as an afterthought (or postscript) to the portraits presented in the rest of the volume.

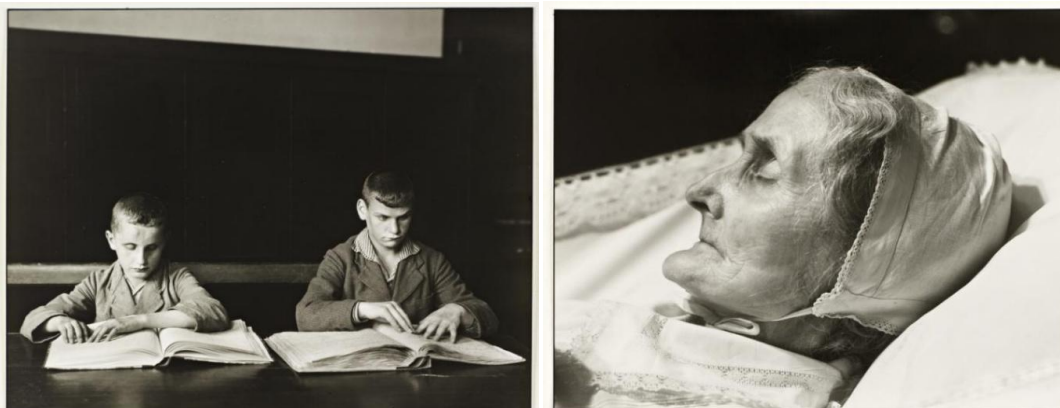
Like analogy, typology depends on an imposed metric of similarity or semblance. The typological form is also (supposedly) birthed from the same scientific and heuristic organizations of knowledge emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and discussed in the preceding chapters.<sup>129</sup> The typology constructs its own visual language, its own form of *Anschauungsunterricht*, to instruct a viewer on the relationality of images based on the classification and structure imposed. Though the typological form achieves what is perhaps its highest level of visibility in the Weimar era, it is birthed from the same eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific and heuristic organizations of knowledge that produced physiognomy. The cultural prevalence of physiognomy indeed guides one’s “reading” of *Antlitz der Zeit*’s typologies (tactilely as a photobook and visually as composed of images), especially with regard to Sander’s categories of “The

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<sup>127</sup> Minor exceptions to this rule exist in “The City” portfolio, which includes pictures of beggars and disabled WWI veterans.

<sup>128</sup> I refer here to the language of the 1920 pro-euthanasia pamphlet by Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens* (“Permission for the Annihilation of Lives Unworthy of Life”). Sander notably titles some of his portraits of the dead “*Materie*” (“matter”).

<sup>129</sup> Steinbock, *Crisis and Classification: Photographic Portrait Typologies in Early 20th-Century Germany*, 6. Other examples of such typologists in the tradition of criminology include Cesare Lombroso (see note 15) and Ernst Kretschmer (see note 132).



**Figure 45**, left: August Sander, “*Blinde Kinder*,” gelatin silver print, ca. 1930. © Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne / ARS, NY, 2019

**Figure 46**, right: Sander, “*Materie*” (“Matter”), gelatin silver print, 1925. © Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne / ARS, NY, 2019

Farmer,” “The Tradesman,” “The Woman,” “Classes and Professions,” “The Artists,” “The City,” and “The Last People.” Through the typologies of *Antlitz der Zeit*, the “face” of the twentieth century is itself rendered composite, providing both specific documentation as well as general “types” among which individual difference is flattened.

Just as one cannot extract typology from the history of a medicalizing discourse, one cannot sever the typological form from Germany’s imperial context. As Kathryn Steinbock writes in her dissertation on photographic portrait typologies in early twentieth-century Germany, “John P. Jackson notes the imperative to chart human difference empirically as a phenomenon coincident with the messiness of decolonization and abolitionism rather than with the stability afforded by strictly absolutist societies.”<sup>130</sup> Typologies (especially as photobooks) proliferate in the interwar period, suggesting the direct relationship between the loss of German colonial territories throughout World War I (German South West Africa is relinquished in 1916, Cameroon in 1916, and German East Africa in 1918) and the popularity of this form. Typology is thus compensatory, fixing its subjects whose subjectivities (or individualities) in daily life are under constant

<sup>130</sup> Steinbock, *Crisis and Classification*, 7.

threat. Helmut Lethen and Steinbock alike argue that the Weimar era at large – with its myriad of conflicting cultures and projects – is undergirded by a typological logic that is only undone by the amorphous but ubiquitous presence of the public as “mass”: “In other words, the crowd was itself a crisis: as the product of a large, heterogeneous society, it signaled a dramatic break with small societies in which differentiation is limited.”<sup>131</sup>

While portraiture depends on the stable signifying power of the face, the typology depends on the stable system of classification that binds it to the overarching premise of pattern to maintain its cohesion.<sup>132</sup>

Like mimesis, faciality is deployed rhetorically to convey a certain authenticity through its individuality and affective visual presence. Though rhetoric and affect can exist at odds, they inevitably overlap and exist symbiotically. Alfred Döblin addresses such tensions at length in his foreword to *Antlitz der Zeit*, presenting the fundamental paradox of faciality to the reader as the tension between its universality and its specificity. He goes on to describe the face as both something of a biometric and a blank slate upon which individuals can project.<sup>133</sup> In this light, the uncanny relation of Sander’s project to the history of a typologizing photographic apparatus of surveillance and discipline must be considered. In his short essay on photography (published in three installments in 1931 in the weekly journal *Die literarische Welt*) entitled “*kleine Geschichte der Fotografie*,” Walter Benjamin suggests that proponents of a “new”

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<sup>131</sup> Steinbock, *Crisis and Classification*, 2.

<sup>132</sup> One such example of these principles applied to a “science” of the relationship between body and mind is Ernst Kretschmer’s highly influential *Körperbau und Charakter: Untersuchungen zum Konstitutionsproblem und zur Lehre von den Temperamenten* from 1931.

<sup>133</sup> “As I say, a forensic fingerprint is not necessary [to identify an individual]. In everyday life, other qualities are sufficient, things that may not be as accurate and numerically exact but which are nevertheless exact enough. A man has such and such a height, posture, and face – an immense complex of information that we can nevertheless take in at a single glance...” Alfred Döblin, “On Faces, Pictures, and Their Truth” in *The Face of Our Time* (Munich: Schirmer Mosel Verlag, 2003), 10-11.

photography such as Sander, Germaine Krull, or Karl Blossfeldt practice photography as a form of “scientific looking”<sup>134</sup> at the service of knowledge instead of commerce. This sets *Neues Sehen* apart from advertising or purely propagandistic photographic practice but certainly positions the use of photography in the nineteenth century to further “scientific” knowledge within a Foucauldian dimension. In his seminal 1986 article, “The Body and the Archive,” Allan Sekula traces the lineage of the criminological photographic portrait and examines its role as an other, an object of a “shadow archive,” to the mass of commercial bourgeois photographic portraits being produced at the turn of the century.<sup>135</sup> Sekula’s “shadow archive” consists of photographic images of criminals and the urban poor as the invisible (or, rather, the less often seen) other of honorific, bourgeois portrait photography. According to Sekula, the shadow archive documents the “criminal” (or degenerate, as in the rheumatically-twisted form in Figure 47) body whereas the honorific archive showcases the “law-abiding body” (Figure 48). Consequently, these two bodies (“biotypes”<sup>136</sup>) and their respective archives are mutually exclusive. At the peak of this photographic typologizing in the late nineteenth century, photography no longer exclusively gave form to the bourgeois self. Instead, photographic portraiture forked into two oppositional functions:

...photographic portraiture began to perform a role no painted portrait could have performed in the same thorough and rigorous fashion. This role derived, not from any honorific portrait tradition, but from the imperatives of medical and anatomical illustration. Thus photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other, to define both the generalized look – the typology – and the contingent instance of deviance and social pathology...thus the photographic

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<sup>134</sup> This language is borrowed from Lisa Cartwright’s *Screening the Body*.

<sup>135</sup> Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (December 1986): 347.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 351.

portrait in particular was welcomed as a socially ameliorative as well as a socially repressive instrument.<sup>137</sup>

As criminology harnessed the “universal mimetic language of the camera,”<sup>138</sup> the discipline became waterlogged by the sheer mass of information produced by criminal photography. This necessitated the archival structure of Alphonse Bertillon and the typology, a schema of classification later emulated by Sander.<sup>139</sup> The typology is then a “composite picture” of a stratum of society insofar as, inversely, “the Galtonian composite can be seen as the collapsed version of the archive.”<sup>140</sup> Sekula describes the hermeneutic paradigm organizing the shadow archive as dependent upon the traditions of physiognomy and phrenology, praxes that also depend on the metonymic relation of object to type that organizes archival apparatuses.<sup>141</sup> (It should be noted that Sander later produced his own “shadow archive” in the form of his “Persecuted” series beginning circa 1938. However, this series remains an honorific style of portrait insofar as it highlights and preserves the individuality of its sitters while absorbing them into a “persecutory” type.) The typological form of *Antlitz der Zeit* effaces some of the difference and nuance Sander hoped to faithfully preserve and re-present. Though Sander possessed leftist sympathies and deconstructed his own archive through projects more aligned with a phenomenological “new vision,” his normative taxonomy of the German *Volk* overshadows these efforts. Wittingly or not, *Antlitz der Zeit* perpetuates a medicalizing model of classification that undergirds interwar eugenics and idealizing aesthetics.<sup>142</sup> Through the typology of the volume, the “face” of the twentieth century is

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<sup>137</sup> Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” 346.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 352.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 357.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 373.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 347.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

itself a composite providing both specific documentation as well as general “types,” among which individual difference is flattened. The fundamental paradox of both faciality and the typology, then, is the tension between their particularity and their



**Figure 47**, left: To the shadow archive of the underprivileged and “criminal” one could also add the photographic portraits of psychiatric patients by professor of anatomical pathology Jean-Martin Charcot, neurologist Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne, and Adrian Tournachon, (the brother of famed portrait photographer Felix Nadar) at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. Photo of young girl with severe muscular atrophy and chronic rheumatism. As in the “diagnostic” sequences in *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, the child is cleaved from her environment and any signs of individuality are effaced by a penetrating, medical gaze. She is objectified as a case study and further framed as degenerate by her photograph’s inclusion in the pathologizing volume. Taken from ‘*Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*’; *Clinique des Maladies du Systeme Nerveux* published under the direction of Professor Charcot et al. Third Volume. Image courtesy of the Wellcome Collection. [Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\)](#)

**Figure 48**, right: A male figure from the *Antlitz der Zeit* portfolio for “sport.” August Sander, “*Bewegungsforscher aus Wien [Max Thun-Hohenheim]*,” 1930, gelatin silver print. © Die Photographische Sammlung / SK Stiftung Kultur - August Sander Archiv, Cologne / ARS, NY

generality, between their status as individual objects and their indissoluble relation to the iconographic tradition of which they are a part. Whereas the fragment (facial or otherwise) remains referential to the whole in the photomontage – even if only by physical relation – typology subsumes the individual image into a plane of similarity instated by the typological container. Typology remains a systemization, an imposition of totality, and an organizational principle that assembles rather than disassembles and reassembles.

The ramifications of the material discussed in this chapter suggest that the disciplinary and documentary function of the criminal photographic portrait and the wide-scale accessibility of the photographic portrait to the urban bourgeois degrade the traditional honorific power of the painted portrait in tandem. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the form of portraiture presented by *Neue Sachlichkeit* Verist painters is then perhaps something quite different altogether, an a-portraiture that is then documentary but *not* archival, metonymic but not typologizing. These works preserve the quality of individuality that degenerate subjects are often denied and transgress the normate ideals of interwar *Körperkultur* by fixating on non-normate bodies. This distinct focus on degenerate bodies (which arguably *cannot* be subsumed under one “type” due to their sheer diversity) without effacing the particularity of the individual sitter is what I argue makes many *Neue Sachlichkeit* works more complex and political than heretofore conceived. In the chapter that follows, I will explore the appropriation and subsequent detournement of physiognomic and degenerate types discussed in chapters one and two by focusing my analysis around key case studies of Verist painted portraiture and the non-normate subjects they re-present.

### Chapter Three: “Reproducing” and Representing Disability in Interwar German Painting: The Case of the “Verists”

In light of these developments, which could include any of these other stabilizations of form [*Formverfestigung*] developed around 1920, it can no longer be claimed that these artists paint representationally because they were not capable of abstraction.

Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei*<sup>143</sup>

Whereas photography takes light as its subject, interwar painting demonstrates an investment in the premise of a “shadow,” that which indexes an object or body but remains formally and ontologically distinct. Phenomenologically speaking, the “shadow” is the condition for its object’s illumination in space – it is the shadow that gives spatial depth to its referent. As aforementioned, Sekula’s discussion of the “shadow archive” of turn-of-the-century photography deeply informs and complicates our understanding of bourgeois portrait photography of the period. In this chapter, I contend that select *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists – notably those included in the “Verist” group here represented by Christian Schad, Otto Dix, and George Grosz – emphasize the concept of the societal “shadow” while inverting it, making the shadow the object rather than the index in order to actually make visible the latent violences and prejudices of Weimar society. In chapter one of this thesis, I analyzed two interwar filmic case studies (*Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, a Weimar body culture film directed by physician and UFA filmmaker Nicholas Kaufmann, and *Nerven*, Robert Reinert’s expressionist film about madness, suicide, and hallucination) in which the non-normate or degenerate body lurks and looms as the consequence for social deviance. In such films, the “degenerate” other is brought center stage and becomes emblematic of the logic that abnormalizes it. Nonetheless, as

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<sup>143</sup> Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus*, 21.



Kaufmann's film powerfully documents, disabled and non-normate bodies are only shown so they can be quickly repressed; their visualization is presented in order to be amended. Through editing and sequencing, *Körperkultur* is presented as a corrective at the individual and national levels. The normative and idealized counterparts of degenerate bodies quickly eclipse the image of abnormality. In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry writes that the inability for society to articulate pain manifests in its political absences.<sup>144</sup> Certainly, Germany's inability to register the scale of its economic and physical losses in World War I produced a compensatory visual culture that tried to simultaneously efface and explain the proliferation of non-normate bodies. But instead of rendering the collective and individual pain of Weimar Germany invisible through the enforcement of normative *Körperkultur*, Verist painters of the period position Germany's shame, pain, and anguish center stage in the form of aberrant bodies.

Out of the most widely published and venerated English-language art historians who have taken up *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its ideas is Benjamin Buchloh. This critic has perhaps written the most widely-cited articles on "new objectivity." I would contest many of Buchloh's views of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its affiliates, however, as they appear to ignore the extremely complex intermedia discourses regarding representation of the period. Both of Buchloh's pieces depend heavily on Georg Lukács' scathing criticism, echoing Lukács sentiment that "...*Neue Sachlichkeit* is so obviously apologetic and leads so clearly away from any poetic reproduction of reality that it can easily merge with the

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<sup>144</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 12.

Fascist legacy.”<sup>145</sup> In Buchloh’s two accounts of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting” (1981) and “Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the End of Portraiture” (1994), the movement is treated as the epitome of regressive and reactionary art. To this end, “Figures of Authority” opens with:

How is it that we are nearly forced to believe that the return to traditional modes of representation in painting around 1915....was a shift of great historical or aesthetic import? And how did this shift come to be understood as an autonomous achievement of the masters, who were in fact the servants of an audience craving for the restoration of the visual codes of recognizability, for the reinstatement of figuration? If the perceptual conventions of mimetic representation – the visual and spatial ordering systems that had defined pictorial production since the Renaissance and had in turn been systematically broken down since the middle of the nineteenth century – were reestablished... what other ordering systems outside of aesthetic discourse had to have already been put in place in order to imbue the new visual configurations with historical authenticity?<sup>146</sup>

Buchloh goes on to contend that *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting cleared the way for authoritarian forms of visual culture, and that, by excluding the relationship of *Neue Sachlichkeit* to the right-wing social realism that would develop thereafter, historians have been complicit in ignoring the broader political significance of interwar reactionism. Such analysis frames *Neue Sachlichkeit* as homogenous, compensatory, and apolitical (or, worse, politically impotent). However, it does not account for the *entartete* label of many of its artists, and the political underpinnings of its “mimetic” structure. It is not my intention to overwrite Buchloh’s argument but simply to complicate it, as it does not comprehensively enough account for the resistance to proto-Fascist aesthetics of totality and the body discussed in chapter one. As I discuss in this chapter, many of *Neue Sachlichkeit*’s most notable artists actively resist an idealizing and classicizing painting,

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<sup>145</sup> Lukács quoted in Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” 40.

<sup>146</sup> Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” 39.

while the subjects of their paintings also openly and defiantly resist the political aims of conservative right-wing groups of the era that would develop into the authoritarian Fascism that Buchloh emphasizes. What is needed is an analysis of such work that accounts for both its aesthetic and cultural/historical contexts: the aesthetic analyses of Lukács and Buchloh are formalist and overlook the complexities not only of the conditions of representation but their significance at the time. To attempt this, I turn first in this chapter to the work of artist and art historian Franz Roh, the first to identify Weimar-era painting as simultaneously distinct and uniquely related to that which came before it.

In the previous chapter, Roh's connection to interwar photography and photomontage was mentioned, and this intermedia influence on painting of the period is noteworthy. Nonetheless, as a writer, Roh remained invested in the "new painting" throughout the twenties, shifting his focus onto photography only towards the late twenties and into the early thirties before his (temporary) internment in Dachau. From Franz Roh's *Nach-Expressionismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (1925) – the first art-historical account of new developments in interwar German painting – it is clear that Roh and the artists he describes always saw their respective projects as political. Certainly, Roh accounts for a certain historical contiguity that Buchloh detests, but Roh sees this as a processual necessity rather than a reactionary kneejerk, a customary "historical inhalation and exhalation" that prevents "intellectual death."

Franz Roh was a student of art historian Heinrich Wöfflin (Roh studied with Wöfflin in Munich, while his contemporary, Gustav Hartlaub, studied with Wöfflin in Berlin around 1910. Wöfflin's other notable students include the art historians Ernst

Gombrich, Erwin Panofsky, and Carl Einstein), and his project follows Wöfflin's suit by attempting to define and periodize developments in modern European painting. Roh's major treatise, *Nach-Expressionismus*, situates what Roh sees as a new development in painting, "Post-Expressionism," within its historical and art historical contexts. Drawing on the thought of influential German-language art historians preceding him such as Alois Riegl (most notably the concept of "*kunstwollen*," or, "the will to art") and Wilhelm Worringer (himself working in the tradition established by Riegl)<sup>147</sup> to guide his taxonomy, he relates the degrees of contemporaneity and influence as well as difference between Impressionism, Expressionism, and Post-Expressionism as being as distinct as the high Italian Renaissance, the Baroque, and the Rococo.<sup>148</sup> While their developments and styles are related, the manifestation of their *kunstwollen* differs dramatically. Roh's project clearly demonstrates Wöfflin's impact, as *Nach-Expressionismus* attempts to define the discrete moments of aesthetic development leading up to and following Expressionism. This presents a linear history of turn of the century art, but Roh complicates his own simple structure with the introduction of his concept of "magical realism" [*magischer Realismus*].

It is clear from Roh's treatise that he conceptualized magical realism in terms synonymous with those used to describe contemporaneous and affiliated movements and art considered avant-garde. Roh describes Post-Expressionism (and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* members among its artists) in almost precisely the same terms that Sighart employs to describe the *Neues Sehen* and that Moholy-Nagy uses to define the avant-gardism he

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<sup>147</sup> The text includes a brief section directly addressing Worringer's work, though he converts Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* into "abstraction or empathy?", suggesting that magical realism depends on the tension between the two "modes" as opposed to any determinate proclivity for one or the other. Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus*, 40.

<sup>148</sup> "Aber auch diese Richtungen haben gemeinsame Untergründe..." Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus*, 10-11.

advanced (“fermentation,” that which is cleaved from seeing with “new eyes,” a “spiritual” and intellectual [*seelische*]<sup>149</sup> pursuit, etc). Why, then, are some of the fervently original yet representational artists of this moment labeled by Buchloh and, subsequently, much of the scholarship, as retrograde and politically conservative? Per Roh’s reading of Post-Expressionist painting, it would be a mistake to consider the bulk of magical realism any less political than the production of its dadaist or proto-Surrealist peers:

...as we leaf through these images, the entire fantastic dream [of Expressionism] seems to fade and, in new morning clarity, again our own world appears before our eyes. We know this world – not only because we are coming out of a dream – but because we see it with new eyes...Instead of infernal, hellish atrocities, we have the unadulterated abominations of our own time (Grosz, Dix). One has the feeling that what has risen out of the demonic yearning, the unbridled (or unrelenting) and all-too hurried transcendentalism, and desire to flee this world is a desire for this terrestrial life, desire for its narrow, fragmented character... When this historical inhaling and exhaling is absent, it appears that there is nothing else to be found other than intellectual death [*geistiger Tod*].

Reactionaries, however, believe in vain that their moment has come with the new art. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that the new object world [*Gegenstandswelt*] is not synonymous with the ordinary concept of realism. The biggest surprise is that [Post-Expressionism] hardly seems more appropriate [to such reactionaries] than Expressionism itself... The new art, however, has become suspicious of all heads, hands, bodies, objects, and all “nervous” things that express “convulsive life” and “blazing enthusiasm,” which appear to it only as a representation of exaggerated force. True, powerful existence is now depicted as sensible, brazen, restrained. We don’t need to describe in so much detail the new types of men, women, children, animals, trees, and rocks pictured here.

Finally, this art does not belong to a series of breakthroughs that includes Expressionism, but rather to a series of *clarifying processes* that, luckily, finds itself at the vanguard of a new path of revolution almost complete. The new art also expresses itself in a more measured, themed world. We must wait and see if, hereby – above all through reinstating objectivity – a new connection with the people [*Volk*] is possible. *After all, history has shown that the lower class – those*

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<sup>149</sup> I translate “*seelische*” throughout Roh’s text as “spiritual,” in line with the language of the Bauhaus thinkers. I think to translate it otherwise effaces the potential gravity of this resonance between Roh’s thought and that of his “more avant-garde” contemporaries.

*with difficult, monotonous work – finds careful, thoughtful things more accessible than things which are brilliantly extravagant.*<sup>150</sup>

Roh's description of figurative painting as *accessible* to the masses (without being "mass culture" or kitsch, per say) is crucial, especially considering the association of Verists such as Grosz with the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD). Though Dix and Schad were not explicitly political and Schad was never labeled *entartete* by the "Third Reich," their affiliation with Grosz and the overtly political factions of dada belie a basic shared politic.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, Roh intimates that each artist's re-presentation of "the unexterminated atrocities of our own time" remains a veritably political confrontation with the dark side of Weimar society – in other words, that which eludes the "ideal."

It is not insignificant that Roh also localizes representations of an expressionistic, "convulsive life" to the body and its parts, since, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, there is no more universal vehicle for communicating the fraught affective

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<sup>150</sup> Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus*, 24-26. Emphases and translation are my own. My English translation from the German differs from Faris and Zamora's translation from the Spanish version of Roh's treatise, though I have borrowed their language of "convulsive" for "*zuckende*" [*sic*]. *Zuckende* can be translated as "twitching" or "quivering" and has an involuntary, somatic quality. The translation provided in the Faris and Zamora volume remains partial, and only reflects roughly twenty-eight pages of Roh's 184-page treatise. They reproduce and translate five of the seventeen sections in Roh's 1925 edition: "The New Objects" ("*Die neuen Gegenstände*," 22-26 in the original pagination), "Objectivity" ("*Gegenständlichkeit überhaupt*," 27-35), "The Proximity of the Object as Spiritual Creation" ("*Objektnähe als geistige Schöpfung*," 36-39), "The New Space" ("*Der neue Raum*," 53-56), and "Smaller than Natural (Miniature)" ("*Das Unterlebensgroße (Miniatur)*," 57-62). See "Franz Roh: Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism," translated from the Spanish by Wendy B. Faris, in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 15-31.

<sup>151</sup> Susanne Meyer-Büser writes of Dix, "From 1919, Dix had been in touch with George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield and Wieland Herzfelde as well as the publicist Paul Westheim and shared their views and manner of life. They shared a revulsion against bourgeois culture and lifestyle, which had lost its significance and meaning after the experience of the First World War." "Otto Dix: Proletarian Rebel and Big-City Dandy" in *Otto Dix: der Böse Blick*, 28. Schad, however, joined the NSDAP in 1933 and left in 1942. Though I take this to represent passive engagement with the party, Bettina Keß argues the following: "*Um künstlerisch arbeiten zu können und sich auch wirtschaftlich abzusichern, musste man also ab September 1933 Mitglied der Reichskulturkammer sein, nicht aber Mitglied der NSDAP, wie es Christian Schad zu diesem Zeitpunkt bereits war.*" Bettina Keß, "*Mitglied (kein Amt, kein Rang): Christian Schad im Nationalsozialismus. Ein neuer Blick auf Eigenbild, Fremdbild und Quellen.*" *RIHA Journal* 0210 (June 18, 2019).

dimensions of the period than the body. This is the legacy of Expressionism with which *Neue Sachlichkeit* still appears to grapple. Certainly, Roh does not consider this itself to be neoclassical or idealism simply because magical realism still concerns itself (in part) with the figuration of the body. However, this may be the starkest distinction between Roh's thought and that of his contemporaries like Moholy-Nagy, though the work and theory of each photographer bears an undeniable resemblance to those of the other.<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, in art historical circles, Moholy-Nagy's thought is interestingly seen as radical and avant-garde while Roh's is not, even though Roh's goals for painting are not altogether incompatible with those of Moholy-Nagy.

As explored in the previous chapter, László Moholy-Nagy advocates for a distorting and fragmenting art in *Malerei, Photographie, Film (Painting, Photography, Film* – this 1925 publication is described by Pepper Stetler as influencing Roh's turn towards photography<sup>153</sup>). However, he starkly opposes the functions of photography and painting. Like Cubist planar “distortions” of representational space, Moholy-Nagy instead sees the distortion of perspective in photography as being in some way more accurately representative of the way(s) that objects exist in the world and the “visions” that exist beyond human perception. However, as mentioned in chapter two, Moholy-Nagy rejects the idea that painting, too, could pursue a “new vision” or project an alternative perception: instead, the project of a “new painting” should pursue color rather than form. Post-Expressionism's consequent objectivity, then, marks the stark divide between Moholy-Nagy's new, purifying vision and Roh's.

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<sup>152</sup> After the publication of *Painting, Photography, Film*, Roh became more closely affiliated with Moholy-Nagy and his body of work through the FiFo exhibition organized in part by Moholy-Nagy. Subsequently, Roh published a book of Moholy-Nagy's photography in 1930, and Roh's experience at FiFo greatly impacted the development of his and Tschichold's book project, *Foto-Auge*, in the same year.

<sup>153</sup> Stetler, “Franz Roh and the Art History of Photography,” 1.

Unlike Moholy-Nagy, Roh does not find the new painting mimetic. He continues to make clear the fundamental distinction between photography (or art that imitates photography, what he calls “*Fotoklebebilder*”<sup>154</sup>) and the Post-Expressionist “new” or “magical” realism of the Verist group.

As long as Post-Expressionism works at this dialectical tension [between a “magical” or other world and the given one], it has the possibility to be intellectual [*geistige*]. However, what can easily happen in embarrassing endeavors for objectivity [*so peinlichem Verdingslichungsstreben*] (which in imitation alone decays) is that the significance thereby shrivels up. Consequently, all painting would be overrun by such splendid machines (of photography and film) whose sovereignty over the realm of imitation is unsurpassable.<sup>155</sup>

The new objectivity (or, even, the “new objects”<sup>156</sup>) is decisively *not* imitative or mimetic for Roh, as it conjures up a new presentation of that which it represents. This distinction also suggests the influence of early phenomenology on Roh’s thought,<sup>157</sup> as the objects gleaned from a new objectivity are themselves constituted by the new vision that perceives them. Another section heading, “*Objectnähe als geistige Schöpfung*” (“verisimilitude” or “figurative precision as act of spiritual creation”), corroborates this. Furthermore, Roh believes (as does Moholy-Nagy) that painting should not redundantly reproduce its objects, which suggests a shift in both the *kunstwollen* and aesthetic epistemology of Post-Expressionist painting from the more mimetic works that came before it. Rather than focus on cohesion of object and representation, Post-Expressionism takes dissonance itself as its subject:

However, there remains a tension in Post-Expressionism. It concerns less the tension between the entities of this world (its “building” blocks – [*Blöcke*]) than

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<sup>154</sup> Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus*, 45.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>156</sup> Roh titles one section of his treatise (pages 22-26) “*Die neuen Gegenstände*,” “the new objects,” perhaps anticipating Hartlaub’s “*neue Sachlichkeit*.”

<sup>157</sup> Roh also variably uses language from Husserl, referencing “*Leib*” and various forms of “*Sein*” associated with “classical” German phenomenology throughout *Nach-Expressionismus*. See appendix 1.



the tension between the idea and the reality (composition and tracing [*Durchzeichnung*]), which are now confronted and pressed into each other more sharply than in Expressionism where reality was overshadowed by the idea. That what matters in this world is this relation of tensions is what Post-Expressionism –course perceptually and unconsciously – wants to express with the tenderly abstract, silently dissonant, almost “inorganic” relationship that reigns between the focus on reality and the exuberant composition of its images.<sup>158</sup>

In other words, while Expressionism privileged the rupture of one world for another, Roh sees Post-Expressionism as focusing more intimately on the dehiscence of the two – the physically-lived world and the spiritually- or mentally-lived world, the object and its concept. Though Moholy-Nagy does not believe “tradition-bound”<sup>159</sup> painters can produce innovative work, Roh’s account of Post-Expressionism proves that some *Neue Sachlichkeit* and magical realist painters are less tradition-bound than they may appear and make the familiar unfamiliar in ways not unlike those of Moholy-Nagy’s purifying art.

Like *Neues Sehen* photography and Expressionist cinema, *Neue Sachlichkeit*’s investment in the concept of a shadow – particularly that of the normate, national body – both engages with and troubles the convention of



**Figure 49:** Umbo, “*Selbstbildnis am Strand*,” gelatin silver print, c. 1930. © 2020 Umbo/Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

preceding aesthetic traditions. While a “tool” of the portrait artist, the shadow is itself

<sup>158</sup> Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus*, 71-72.

<sup>159</sup> “We can also regard – with caution – some of the painters working today with representational, objective means (Neo-Classicists and painters of the ‘*Neue Sachlichkeit*’ movement) as pioneers of a new form of representational optical composition which will soon employ only mechanical and technical means – if we disregard the fact that these very works contain tradition-bound, often plainly reactionary elements.” Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, 27-28.

more or less undesirable in the traditional portrait as it obfuscates that which it intends to represent – it is precisely *not* the subject of the conventional portrait.<sup>160</sup> However, many interwar artists began to trouble this and imbued the shadow with an element of play, as in the work of Umbo (Otto Umbehr) (Figure 49). Like Helmar Lerski in the previous chapter (who was notably preoccupied with the effects of light and shadow in his series, *Metamorphosen des Gesichts: Verwandlungen durch Licht*), Umbehr worked in cinema as well as photography, serving as a camera assistant to Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt*.<sup>161</sup> Perhaps this experience influenced his use of shadow (frequently invoked as a mask, another popular motif among Weimar artists) as well as his treatment of the camera as a prosthetic eye like the *Foto-Auge* and *Kino-Eye* projects discussed in chapter two. The portrait shows Umbehr looking directly at the camera but with eyes both hidden behind sunglasses and cast in the shadow of his own arms, showing both the “seen” and “unseen” parts of his body simultaneously while making materially visible in the photograph that which he cannot himself bear witness to: his own visage. To this end, William Chapman Sharpe writes of Umbo's shadowed self-portrait, “...the shadow of the camera he is holding above him falls across his eyes, as if to say, my camera casts a shadow on my sight, and what I see, and what my camera sees, is all a

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<sup>160</sup> In his 1891 treatise on portraiture, Frank Fowler writes, “The usual and safest way of lighting a sitter will be by a high side light...a light too strong or from an unusual angle, coming from above, for instance, makes two dark caverns of the eye forms and throws heavy shadows under nose, mouth, and chin...choose such an effect of light as will develop this variety [of sinuities] without too violent emphasis...*Do not then be beguiled or lured to failure by the magic of light and shade. Be their master, but let them not master you.*” Fowler writes of light and shadow with high stakes, using language that implies physical harm is done to the body distorted by and thrown in deep shadow and that defines certain forms of lighting as “safe” to form whereas others are perhaps seductively evil, “beguiling,” and threatening. Emphasis is my own. Fowler, *The Art Amateur; A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household* 25 no. 6 (November 1891), 132.

<sup>161</sup> See pages 58-60 for discussion of *Berlin: Symphonie der Großstadt*.

shadow, including myself.”<sup>162</sup> Sharpe belabors the “allegorical” function of the photographed shadow as that which repeats the narrative of the medium’s origin while also serving as the “shadow-sign of the artist’s presence.”<sup>163</sup> This dual nature of the shadow is central both to Expressionist and Post-Expressionist investigations of space, embodiment, and reality I hope to further discuss here.

As Lotte Eisner writes in *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, Expressionist shadows (as well as mirrors and portraits, generally) belong to the signifying realm of the *doppelgänger*. As with mirrors, shadows demonstrate a philosophical and existential tension expressed by an “eternal obsession” rooted in “a fascination with lights.”<sup>164</sup> If we accept that light is the precondition for visual knowledge, the shadow thus comes to “embody” precisely that which cannot be known and re-presented. Shadows signal multiplicity, duplicitousness, and, in Eisner’s words, “destiny” – or, rather, fate (and fatality). The ominous and sinister quality of the shadow is almost never foregone in cinema: the presence of an agent – faceless, seen and yet unknown – is made clear, though its intentions are not. As a narrative device, the shadow reveals just as much as it conceals about the plot, suggesting to a viewer what will pass without disclosing at whose hands. As in Expressionist cinema, Expressionist painting depends on the shadow’s capacity for ambiguity and valence in the individual body. This dialectic tension is integral to the Expressionist aesthetic while also laying the foundations for *Neue Sachlichkeit*’s own anti-aesthetic.

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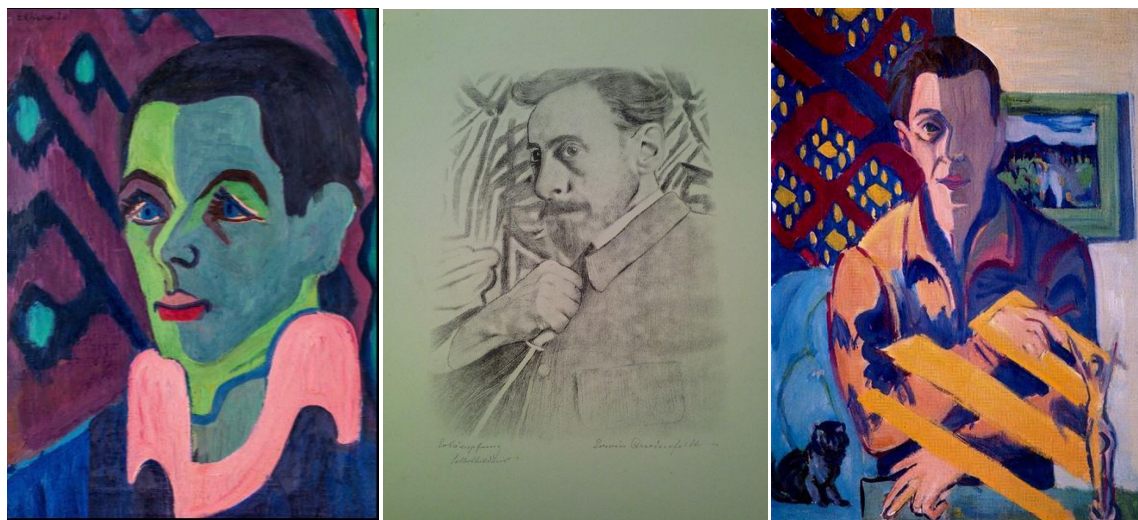
<sup>162</sup> William Chapman Sharpe, *Grasping Shadows: The Dark Side of Literature, Painting, Photography, and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 267.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 265-266.

<sup>164</sup> Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 129.

The distinction here lies at the level of scale: the shadow “elucidated” by *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists is that of the national body rather than the artist’s individual body.

Rather than dictating the space around it, the body in *Neue Sachlichkeit* is severed from its environment; the two elements do not exist in cohesive relation, but in tension.<sup>165</sup> This can be easily contrasted with Expressionist works such as a self-portrait by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (Figure 50), wherein Kirchner and the flat, patterned background behind him are almost spatially indistinguishable though his vivid green complexion



**Figure 50**, left: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, “*Selbstbildnis*,” oil on canvas, 1925–26. © Brücke Museum/Sammlung E. W. Kornfeld, Bern/Davos

**Figure 51**, center: Erwin Quedenfeldt, “*Selbstbildnis*,” 1919. Reproduced from *Lichtzeichnungen* (Düsseldorf: self-published, 1919). Image courtesy of Dr. Janelle Blankenship.

**Figure 52**, right: Kirchner, “*Selbstbildnis*,” oil on canvas, 1931. Image in the public domain.

separates him from the warm print. This piece perhaps anticipates a 1931 portrait (Figure 52) in which the left side of Kirchner’s face is once again cast in shadow but rendered featureless. His arm is “caught” in a bright yellow geometric form in the foreground, which itself recalls the patterned jacket of the 1910 painting, *Selbstbildnis mit Modell*.

<sup>165</sup> Eisner writes, “Kurz stressed that the rules established by the Expressionist artist for the formation of space must be equally valid for the use of the human body: the passion in a situation must be expressed by an intense mobility, and abnormal and excessive movements must be invented. For the inner rhythm of a character’s life is transposed into his gestures.” Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 145.

Reference to other self-portraits as well as photographs of Kirchner reveals that he repeatedly exaggerated and expanded the shadow in his painting to bifurcate his face. The background design's vivid color and flat, planar pattern evoke the "oscillating" sensation of earlier Fauvist works as well as Erwin Quedenfeldt's experimental photographic "distorted" portraiture and "light-pressed" images (Figure 51), perhaps bridging such efforts with the "convulsive" Post-Expressionists.<sup>166</sup>

Having established Post-Expressionist painting including *Neue Sachlichkeit* tendencies as neither mimetic nor reactionary but instead engaged with the discourses of politics, scientific and phenomenological studies of perception, and interwar media theory, I now turn to a brief genealogy of the portrait mode in the German tradition.

### ***Neue Sachlichkeit* and the Portrait**

Apart from the odd still life, *Neue Sachlichkeit*'s subject is almost unilaterally the body. Corporeality (and the plurality of experience in the period thereof) is front and center in a large majority of the works, which take the form of two main compositions: the group scene and the portrait. The return to the portrait mode of painting is important not only because it is an anomaly among contemporaneous German art, but because of the portrait's socio-political history. The portrait is a "historically inaccessible genre,"<sup>167</sup> since portraits (not political caricatures or religious woodcut souvenirs like those in medieval Germany) would not be widely circulated or even generally visible beyond the home of their patron. Portraits were reserved primarily for the wealthy or for royalty,

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<sup>166</sup> For more on Quedenfeldt's unique photographic processes, see Erwin Quedenfeldt, "Die absolute Lichtbildkunst," *Photographische Korrespondenz* no. 12 (December 1, 1928): 337, 368.

<sup>167</sup> Buchloh, "Residual Resemblance," 59.

providing images of the incarnate body politic. The tradition is honorific, thaumaturgic, and apotheosizing.

However, put simply, the portrait as a mode of painting is not essentially German. Nineteenth-century German art can be boiled down to the Romanticists (also referred to as the *Sturm und Drang* period) and the Neoclassicists (Anton-Raphael Mengs, for example), whose revival of classical idealism was inspired by the late eighteenth-century writings of art historian Johann Winckelmann. Despite this, the neoclassicist tradition did not develop deep roots in German painting, and Romanticists were prone to favor landscapes over people.<sup>168</sup> Thus, there are few portraits in the centuries that precede *Neue Sachlichkeit* that could be described as appropriate forebears to a movement principally committed to the portrait. Instead, direct resonances can be seen in *Neue Sachlichkeit* works with the richest source of a “German” portrait tradition, the Northern Renaissance in the late fifteenth to late sixteenth centuries. *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its devotees often drew direct influence from Northern Renaissance works and share more in common with the figurative but often whimsically uncanny period than the late neoclassicism of artists like Mengs.<sup>169</sup> As Steve Plumb has noted in reference to Dix’s 1934 “Triumph of Death,” this selective citation could also have been an artistic way of advancing a

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<sup>168</sup> Romanticists such as Phillip Otto Runge painted a handful of portraits, but Runge’s work provides no artistic touchstone for *Neue Sachlichkeit* works. However, major exhibitions of Runge, Friedrich, and *Biedermeier* painting were popular in the 1920s, as German art historians revisited the nineteenth century following the war. Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism*, 20.

<sup>169</sup> While 1920s German art historians were revisiting the previous century’s art, many *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists and affiliates looked directly back to the Northern Renaissance. Some examples include Franz Roh writing about a major Bruegel retrospective in 1918 and Otto Dix explicitly modeling a 1912 self-portrait after Albrecht Dürer’s 1493 image. More recently, an entire exhibition was organized around Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece and its career-long influence on Dix at the Musée Unterlinden.

different kind of “Germanness” than Nazi and proto-Nazi visual culture that depended on a Social Realism heavily influenced by Romantic values.<sup>170</sup>

The self-portrait returned to Germany with the emphatic anguish and formal deviancy of the Expressionists, but *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists composed both self-portraits as well as portraits of others (and Others). Internationally, Benjamin Buchloh identifies the portrait as having been dismantled and renewed between 1907-1912 by the Cubists. However, Picasso’s neoclassical “return to the mimetic portrait” in 1915 evidently ended this innovation, as he appeared to relent to the mimetic paradigm: “In portraiture, a seemingly natural and guaranteed nexus between object and representation had appeared particularly evident; in fact, mimetic resemblance had been one of the category’s founding conditions.”<sup>171</sup> What, then, is history and art historiography supposed to make of these veritable “antiportraits”<sup>172</sup> that defy the form, function, and conditions of portraiture itself?

I would argue that *Neue Sachlichkeit* works remain portraits insofar as they take the body as their primary object, but, in other examples, *Neue Sachlichkeit* works go as far as to invert the functions of physiognomy and phrenology and turn these methods back on their perpetrators. *Neue Sachlichkeit*’s subversion of the bureaucratic typologizing apparatus normally wielded to surveil and subsequently sanitize the *Volkskörper* instead reveals the Weimar bourgeoisie to be the criminals, the deranged, and the greedy, while visually-suppressed victims of material and institutional violence like the disabled, non-normatively embodied, and otherwise socially marginal are made

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<sup>170</sup> Plumb, ““Inner Emigration,”” 269.

<sup>171</sup> Emphasis is my own. Buchloh, “Residual Resemblance,” 53-54.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 53.

highly visible. To this effect, let us turn now to painted representations of disability among three artists from the “Verist” group of *Neue Sachlichkeit* portraitists: Christian Schad, Otto Dix, and George Grosz.

### **Christian Schad**

I begin with Schad as perhaps the most ambiguous figure of the three artists discussed here. There is very little scholarship on the work of Christian Schad compared to Otto Dix or George Grosz. This is perhaps because his oeuvre leaves less potential room for interpretation than the varied efforts of Dix and Grosz, but the arc of his productivity and politics remains an interesting territory, nonetheless. The periodization of his major work is represented as completely discrete: the dada era and its *schadographs* versus the conventional painted portraits. But there may be sly continuity between these modes: cameraless photography and “mimetic” painting meet each other at a point of empirical obsolescence, in the chiasm of form and function. Each transgresses their supposed utility or function in order to access realms of experience otherwise normally undocumented and invisible to their medium. The main difference is the anemic quality attributed to figurative painting over its more “novel” counterpart. To identify his 1920s focus on painting as reflecting of a growing conservatism would be overly simplistic and efface the marginalized subjects he still sought out. As Matthias Eberle writes, Schad’s portraits of those on the fringes “ennobl[ed] them with his style, because they all insist on being individuals who have not conformed. Schad took his models seriously, selecting them without commissions; he never attempted to expose or demean



them, he avoided the morbid and the macabre, he did not savor ugliness.”<sup>173</sup> Though I would quibble with Eberle’s description of a congenitally-disabled man and a black woman in a painting I will analyze in the following pages as “insist[ing]” on “not conform[ing]” with society by choosing to make livings as performers, I agree with Eberle that Schad’s representation of non-normate figures is conventionally honorific rather than exploitative. Eberle continues to expound the importance of beauty itself to Schad, which would suggest that Schad’s aesthetic made space for (or, indeed, in some way depended on) socially fragmented subjects and bodies rather than depending on a fixed and ideal notion of beauty. While work by Schad was not in the 1925 *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition in Mannheim and his work *was* shown in the “Great German Art” show opposite the *entartete* exhibition, his oeuvre nonetheless clearly demonstrates an investment – in some capacity – the shadow(s) of normative German society.<sup>174</sup>

In “Figures of Authority,” Buchloh writes of Schad as falling prey to “authoritarian alienation” in his return to painting and as “seek[ing] to halt that modernism.”<sup>175</sup> However, this assessment of the work’s formal conventionality as being pursued under the simple aegis of “novelty” ignores other ideological underpinnings and effects. It disregards that Schad “returned” to figuration in the mid-twenties before joining the NSDAP in 1933 (which is to say that he did not join the party until Hitler became chancellor). It also bypasses the “fermenting” or “clarifying” model of aesthetic development popularized by Moholy-Nagy (and, to a lesser extent, Roh) at the time. Even in Schad’s most well-known painting, *Selbstbildnis* of 1927, the space (and that

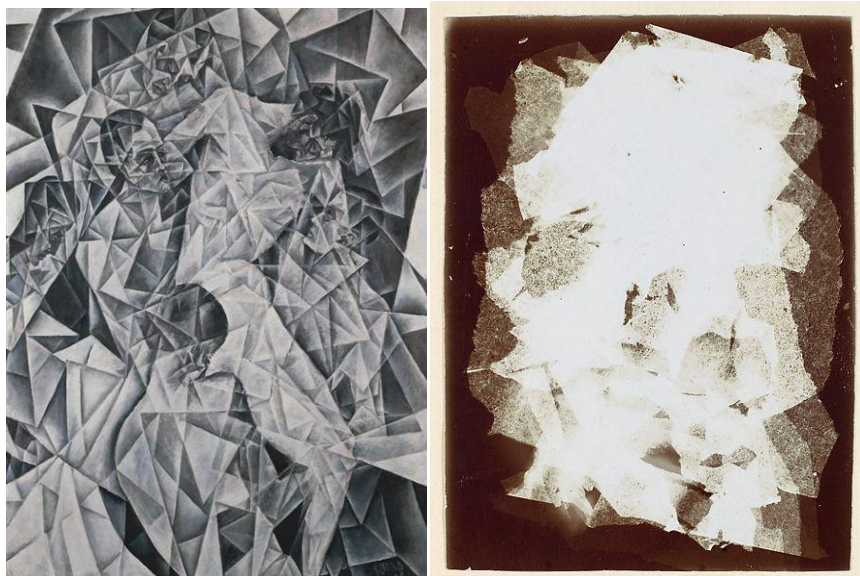
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<sup>173</sup> Matthias Eberle, “*Neue Sachlichkeit* in Germany: A Brief History,” *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, ed. Sabine Rewald (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 28.

<sup>174</sup> Eberle describes the 1937 *Große deutsche Kunstausstellung* as the last public exhibition of Schad’s work in his lifetime. Eberle, “*Neue Sachlichkeit* in Germany,” 29.

<sup>175</sup> Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” 49-50.

within it) is not mimetic and instead represents the dismantlement of one-point perspective and linear organizations of perception seen in avant-garde efforts and carried over into the “traditional” realms of figurative painting and the portrait. This yields what art historian Linda Nochlin called “preternaturally clear, fetishistic detail” and a scene in which “everything has to do with imaginative manipulation...an imaginative construct, not painted from nature.”<sup>176</sup> It develops a spatial – not formal – resemblance to his earlier works. In his work from the 1910s, Schad assembles spaces that are superficially “analytical Cubist,” fractured and refracted rather than “simultaneous” or “composite” as in the work of Braque and Picasso (Figure 53). The work is evocative of Erwin Quedenfeldt’s earlier cameraless compositions and appears caught between the aesthetics of Expressionism and Cubism (Figure 51). Following this period, Schad moved towards dadaist aesthetics before “settling” into figurative painting.



**Figure 53**, left: Christian Schad, “Kreuzabnahme,” oil on canvas, 1916. © Christian-Schad-Stiftung Aschaffenburg (CSSA) / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

**Figure 54**, right: Christian Schad, “Schadograph 27,” gelatin silver print, 1919. © ARS New York.

<sup>176</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Christian Schad and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*,” *Artforum* 41 no. 10 (June 2003), 179.

The most esteemed works from Schad's "dada period" are his schadographs (Figure 54). These represent the earliest abstract photograms made purely for an artistic purpose, anticipating Man Ray's rayographs from the early 1920s. Though Schad did not dub them "schadographs," their name represents an aesthetic epistemology that separates them from later photograms. The most obvious significance of the name besides its inclusion of Schad's own is the double entendre of the "schadograph" as a "shadowgraph." This inverts the etymology of "photograph" (or the more descriptive *Lichtbildkunst* in German), privileging the role of light's absence instead of the light itself and suggesting that the shadows and dark areas of the image hold equal signifying weight as the light.<sup>177</sup>

Though such work is regarded as entirely distinct and severed from Schad's later productivity, there is perhaps continuity in his sustained, early interest in the concept of a "shadow" in the form of marginal – and certainly degenerate – subjects. In Schad's 1928 painting *Agosta der Flügelmensch und Rasha die schwarze Taube*, the overtly "disabled" is represented by Agosta, a man working as an attraction at the Onkel Pelle Zirkus in Berlin-Wedding at the time (Figure 55).<sup>178</sup> His performing partner, Rasha, "the black dove," does not seem to have been disabled, but simply "other" as an African woman performing in a German circus.<sup>179</sup> Roland März describes the painting in particularly compelling language as

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<sup>177</sup> Additionally, the term "schadographs" reflects early artistic cameraless photography's investment in "scientific looking" practices discussed in chapter one. "Schadographs" depend on both the naming convention and the spectacularity of Röntgen's early x-rays known as "röntgenograms."

<sup>178</sup> Nochlin, "Christian Schad and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*," 179.

<sup>179</sup> For more on *Völkerschauen* and ethnographic exhibitions in Germany, see Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

...a new type of ‘royal portrait’ with two main figures from the carnie trade...Agosta enthroned as naked ‘king’ in all his bodily deformity [*Mißbildung*], with Rasha, the exotic Madagascar woman, at his feet...white is set against black, disability [*Versehrtheit*] against beauty. A bodily language of contrast...a vision contra bourgeois [*bürgerliche*] convention and a plea to see their self-evident human dignity.<sup>180</sup>

However, März’s stark opposition of “disability” and “beauty” is certainly troubled when considered in context of the normate interwar body culture borne out of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century degeneracy theory and racial pseudoscience that both, in some way, depend on the premise of an idealized bodily aesthetic. While we can appreciate Rasha’s



**Figure 55**, left: Christian Schad, “*Agosta der Flügelmensch und Rasha die schwarze Taube*,” oil on canvas, 1929. © Christian Schad Stiftung Aschaffenburg/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn and DACS, London.

**Figure 56**, right: Christian Schad, “*Bildnis Dr. Haustein*,” oil on canvas, 1928. © Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

beauty today, her beauty would have been anti-ideal and subsequently anti-aesthetic to a Weimar viewing public. The painting remains honorific of subjects, however, who would

<sup>180</sup> Translation is my own. Roland März, “*Künstlerisches Umfeld – Berlin*,” *George Grosz: Berlin-New York* (Berlin: Peter-Klaus Schuster, 1994), 71.

perhaps not otherwise sit for a portrait in oils. As described by Allan Sekula and Suzannah Biernoff after him, honorific portraiture remains honorific as long as it continues to repress its medical and criminal others. However, this portrait collapses the distinctions between these categories, more or less ennobling medically and culturally “deviant” and “degenerate” bodies by representing them as worthy of painted likeness and aesthetic value. That such a large work was not commissioned and was produced independently suggests the commitment of the artist to the task. Though the portrait is honorific, the two figures are paired (or doubled) as not quite human; their bodies are framed in the language of animals (as birds) that “riffs” on Agosta’s deformity and Rasha’s tone.<sup>181</sup>

Nonetheless, Schad’s representation of a black woman as a primary figure is perhaps unprecedented in German portraiture: not only is Rasha named, but she is also a central figure and subject of the portrait.<sup>182</sup> While several black circus performers and workers are represented in the *Zirkus* portfolio of August Sander’s *Menschen des 20.*

*Jahrhunderts*, they appear on the same plane with or in the background of group scenes

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<sup>181</sup> A brief medical article has postulated that incorrect translations of “*Flügelmensch*” as “pigeon-chested” have concealed authentic connotations of Agosta’s performance in this painting. The authors instead argue that, as a person who possibly had Marfan’s syndrome, Agosta was known as a “*Flügelmensch*” (directly, “bird person”) due to an abnormally large “wingspan.” See Roland Strauss, Helena Marzo-Ortega, and Andreas Bruckner, “Did the ‘Pigeon Chested Man’ Have Marfan’s Syndrome?,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 95 (February 2002) 104.

<sup>182</sup> What remains possibly the only other precedent of honorific German painted portraiture of a black person prior to Schad’s work is Emil Dörstling’s portrait of Gustav Sabac el Cher, the son of an Egyptian man given to a Prussian diplomat as a gift and brought to Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century. The 1890 painting *Preußisches Liebesglück*, now in the Deutsches Historisches Museum, was followed by a 1908 honorific portrait of Sabac el Cher in full Prussian military uniform. Sabac el Cher was also a noted composer and conductor who performed both under imperial rule and during the Weimar period. Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann-Smirnov point to the case of Gustav Sabac el Cher as one of but many persons of the African diaspora to not only participate in but leave a major impact on German culture of the time despite the relative absence of black bodies in extant German visual culture. Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov, “Introduction,” in *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact 1250-1914*, edited by Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann-Smirnov (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 1. On the important mark black German actors left on Weimar cinema, see Tobias Nagl, *Die Unheimliche Maschine: Rasse und Repräsentation im Weimarer Kino* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2009).

with their white counterparts.<sup>183</sup> Unlike Otto Dix's grotesque caricatures of black women (notably in *John Penn* of 1922, *Negerin* of 1923, two racist fantasies of black female bodies that feature exaggerated breasts and minstrel-like grins; the bared teeth in *Negerin* are depicted through hapless, jagged, oblique strokes of white paint, evoking fangs and subsequently dehumanizing the sitter), Schad depicts Rasha directly, providing definition and varying tone to her skin and realistic texture to her hair. This representation is not immune to criticism, however: as Lorraine O'Grady wrote in her article laying bare the structural effacement of black female subjectivity, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," the black female body's "function continues to be, by their chiaroscuro, to cast the difference of white men and white women into sharper relief."<sup>184</sup> Still, Rasha is centered in a way that Olympia's maid, Laure, was not. Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby drew attention to the woman she identifies as Laure in her own article, "Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid," by noting that

...the effect of Laure's presence, the way we typically read her, is as a subservient foil, a woman that even the keen eyes of Manet scholars such as T.J. Clark, Michael Friend, and Carol Armstrong could all but ignore. Manet's painting has often been discussed as the picture of one woman, the white woman who gives the painting its name.<sup>185</sup>

Conversely, Rasha *cannot* be overlooked, nor is she made formally peripheral. Schad's title confirms that it is intentionally a double portrait, though Rasha's portrait is truncated

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<sup>183</sup> Sander's photos notably depict a Cologne circus with at least four distinct black members (counting the black-presenting persons in the three images *Zirkusleute vor dem Zelt. Köln* and two images both titled *Zirkusleute, Köln*. All images were taken in 1926, and none of the figures therein are named.

<sup>184</sup> Though the maid is named by O'Grady in 1992 as Laura, she is known as Laure in Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby's more recent and thorough investigation into the historical figure, "Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid," from a 2015 edition of *Art Bulletin*. See the following footnote. Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," *Afterimage* 20 no. 1 (Summer 1992) 14.

<sup>185</sup> Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Still Thinking about Olympia's Maid," *The Art Bulletin* 97 no. 4 (December 2015), 435. Performing an archival investigation into the identities of the real women depicted in Otto Dix and Christian Schad's paintings of black women in Weimar Germany parallel to Grigsby's own would certainly prove a worthwhile and fruitful project contributing to the (relatively) scant body of knowledge about black and black female experience in interwar Germany and Europe at large.

just below her chest. She remains integral to the composition not only as “chiaroscuro,” but also as a fully determined figure whose eye contact with the viewer suggests her own agency in the encounter.<sup>186</sup> Though professional spectacles, both Agosta and Rasha wield the gaze in this portrait – seemingly unphased and perhaps wearily, but re-directing the look to their viewer(s) nonetheless. Instead of operating as a physical and formal shadow, Rasha is primary in the painting’s foreground, obscuring part of Agosta’s seated body. His form rises behind hers, taking up more dimensional room, receding into space, and causing his outline to appear more like a distorted shadow cast askew upon a wall.

We can contrast this painting with a more “conventional” portrait prominently featuring a literal shadow: Schad’s portrait of Dr. Hans Haustein (Figure 56). Dr. Haustein could be described as *entartete* by association: originally trained as a dermatologist, the Jewish doctor specialized in venereal disease while also providing prostitutes with abortions and other contraception.<sup>187</sup> Further, Haustein’s wife, Frau Dr.

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<sup>186</sup> In her book on African-American poet laureate Rita Dove, Therese Frey Steffen describes a historical encounter between the “American Black Dove” and the portrait of Rasha, which catalyzed one of Dove’s poems. In the poem, Dove (who viewed Schad’s painting in a gallery in Berlin in 1982) develops what Steffen calls an “intertextua[l] minority discourse” and “a web of intercultural exchange.” Rasha emerges as a figure of artistic inspiration for both Schad’s white, male gaze, and Dove’s black, female gaze. Both Agosta and Rasha are recontextualized in Dove’s “picture poem” as possessing a “merciless” gaze that calmly denies the objectifying visions they are subjected to as social others unified in “[t]heir being monstrously and *vitally* uncanny” (emphasis is my own). Rasha not only empowers Dove and Schad’s creative acts, but, through the poem’s narrative, Dove assumes the “role” of Rasha to inspire Schad (who also published his own notes on the dialogue he had with Rasha and Agosta, writing in 1977 that, after a very brief visit with these sideshow artists, they had “told him more about their lives than he would have been told at a 5 o’clock tea”) to produce the painting. Therese Frey Steffen, *Crossing Color: Transcultural Space in Rita Dove’s Poetry, Fiction and Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90-92; Christian Schad quoted in Sabine Rewald, *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 155.

<sup>187</sup> This painting lives on in the scholarship not as a particularly novel or interesting painting but as documentation of a notable figure of the time. Haustein is remembered for his leftist politics and work as Jewish clinician specializing in venereal disease and abortion – which is to say, “degeneracy” of the medical, political, and social kinds. The painting is taken up by dermatologists rather than art historians in the brief piece, “Christian Schad and Dr. Haustein: An Example of Art and Dermatology Under the Nazi Regime” (despite the fact that the painting was made in 1928, five years before the NSDAP’s official rise to power). Pablo Coto-Segura, Covadonga Coto-Segura, and Jorge Santos Juanes, “Christian Schad and Dr.

Friedel Haustein, was known for hosting a left-leaning salon and co-authored research with Dr. Haustein on syphilis. As in portraits by Dix or Sander, the sitter is shown with a tool of his trade in the form of a gynecological instrument used for performing abortions (then illegal). The curettage rests in the crook of his elbow, and some have suggested that such prominent placement refers to his outspoken support of women's reproductive freedom.<sup>188</sup> This otherwise innocuous symbol becomes slightly ominous and lascivious through the addition of Haustein's mistress, Sonja, in the form of a large, looming silhouette. Sonja "overshadows" Haustein, the presumed subject of the portrait, with her ambiguous and alien presence. Her own anatomy is distorted, with what is likely a close-cropped bob (in line with "New Woman" styles) making her head appear bald and bulbous and the profile view of her cigarette-holding hand giving the appearance of her having three tapered, talon-like fingers.<sup>189</sup> Additionally, the space in the Haustein portrait is fundamentally unreal due to this play of light: Sonja's exaggerated shadow could not be projected on the wall without affecting the light source's illumination of Haustein, and the facture of the rest of the painting suggests that the backdrop is not a curtain onto which the shadow is projected from behind. Sonja's shadow indeed overcomes Haustein, perhaps lurking as a sinister threat rather than a benevolent lover (of which some have noted the irony, as Haustein's infidelity led to his wife killing herself<sup>190</sup>). Schad's own

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Haustein: An Example of Art and Dermatology Under the Nazi Regime," *Arch Dermatology* 144 no. 2 (2008), 214.

<sup>188</sup> D. Schultheiss, for one, notes this in his brief article, "The Portrait of Dr. Haustein," *European Urological Supplement* 17 no. 2 (March 2018), 258.

<sup>189</sup> I have reason to believe that the Sonja here represented in shadow is the same Sonja painted by Christian Schad in the same year. Based on the information provided by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Schad was introduced to both Haustein and Sonja, the subject of a separate 1928 portrait, through Felix Bryk. In the Sonja portrait, she is also smoking and wearing her hair in a tightly cropped style that does not protrude past the nature curve of her head, as in the silhouette in the Haustein portrait.

<sup>190</sup> Coto-Segura et. al, "Christian Schad and Dr. Haustein," 214.



participation in the Hausteins' leftist salons coupled with this portrait complicate readings like Buchloh's that consider such portraits merely as signs of a blooming fascist politic.

Even if one were to count Christian Schad as among the most conservative portraitists of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* group, aberrations in his oeuvre exist that cannot be accounted for under such a stringent narrative. As seen in these case studies, Schad's body of work and its subjects demonstrate a vested interest in non-normate forms of representation as well as "normative" representation of degenerate subjects. Another artist we must consider here is Otto Dix. Scholars such as Steve Plumb have emphasized artist Otto Dix's "fence sitting," as Dix continued to work throughout the Second World War and did not emigrate as his more radical peers did. Nonetheless, Dix's work also provides a complex picture of degeneracy and disability in the interwar period similar to Schad's paintings. Let us now turn our attention to Otto Dix's 1922 *An die Schönheit* ("To Beauty") (Figure 57), an image that is both a self-portrait and a group scene.

### **Otto Dix: *An die Schönheit***

The painting's name references Symbolist Max Klinger's 1897 print of the same title featuring a kneeling nude in a clearing before water. This citation conveys the irony and novelty of Dix's conception of beauty: instead of revelry in the sublime, Dix himself is suggested to be the "beauty" in question even though he aligns himself with both *modische* and *entartete* styles of bodily performance. In the center of this veritable pastiche of aesthetics is Dix, holding a telephone in one hand and with his other in the pocket. Surrounding him is a variety of figures: a Weimar "New Woman" and her

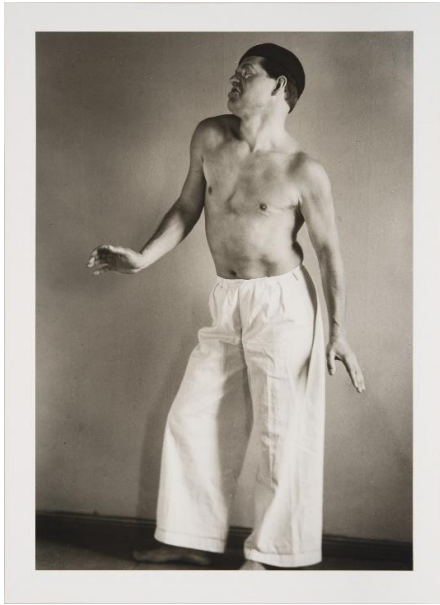
dancing partner, implied to be homosexual;<sup>191</sup> a black American drummer, coded by his handkerchief as well as his jazz (distastefully but descriptively named *Negermusik* in German) drum kit and his own exaggerated image;<sup>192</sup> and two fashion mannequins outfitted with the outmoded fashions of Wilhelmine Germany. In their collective but discrete presences (all figures except the dancing pair are completely separated from one another), the figures present a unique cross-section of embodied subjectivities to be



**Figure 57:** Otto Dix, “*An die Schönheit*,” oil on canvas, 1922. © Erich Lessing/ ARS, NY

<sup>191</sup> Susan Funkenstein, “A Man’s Place in a Woman’s World: Otto Dix, Social Dancing, and Constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Germany,” *Women in German Yearbook* 21 (2005), 169.

<sup>192</sup> Funkenstein suggests that, though black, the drummer is also in blackface: “As in those minstrel shows, the jazz drummer’s depiction in *To Beauty* is so exaggeratedly stereotypical that his blackness seems overdone and obviously performed. In the painting this blackface creates a play of ethnic identity: the black man wears blackface in order to look like a white man – a white man who in turn would have performed in a minstrel show in blackface.” Funkenstein, “A Man’s Place,” 168.



**Figure 58:** August Sander, “*Raoul Hausmann als Tänzer*,” gelatin silver print, 1929 (printed 1974). © Middlebury College Museum of Art, Vermont (accessed through Artstor Public Collections)

encountered in Weimar Germany – all of which, in this case, are culturally degenerate, if not visually distorted. The primary figures in the frame face (or, rather, confront) the viewer, positioning a spectator as a witness to the debauched scene, but, also, as a potential intruder. Dix uses this confrontational air to distance himself from a bourgeois spectatorship and instead identify himself as a cosmopolitan

dandy with a penchant for American pastimes like jazz<sup>193</sup> and “Indianthusiasm.”<sup>194</sup>

Dix sets the scene as its core as rigidly

masculine, thoroughly modern, embodying a plurality of conflicting performances.

Despite Dix’s well-documented enthusiasm for dancing, he is neither dancing nor

<sup>193</sup> By 1930, jazz was disparaged as not only an *entartete Musik* belonging to an inferior race but also as being under the influence of New York Jews. It was outright banned over the course of several years, from 1932-1935. Though it was banned for being racially impure and degenerate, it remained immensely popular.

<sup>194</sup> Indigenous Americans reappear in another work of Dix’s from 1922: the *Zirkus* portfolio of etchings. At this time, Dix had returned to Dresden and presumably patronized the Sarrasini Circus, which had a permanent home in Dresden until 1923. The Sarrasini Circus was also known for its Sioux performers: Dix depicts three such performers clad in war bonnets in the *Amerikanischer Reitakt* (“American Riding Act”) etching from the same portfolio. While historians like Meyer-Büser and Funkenstein emphasize Dix’s interest in American culture, I think it is also important to note this biographical detail and Dix’s proximity to and fascination with indigeneity (albeit performed, commercialized, and more or less indentured as part of the *Völkerschauen* ethnographic spectacle tradition). German author Karl May, who was also based in Dresden for much of his life, was also extremely influential in the interwar period. His late nineteenth-century novels about the American West popularized Native Americans in the German imagination. Additionally, in 1919, a critic said of Dix: “He is an Indian, a Sioux chief. Always on the warpath. He swings his brush like an axe, and every stroke is a scream of color...” Susan Funkenstein also draws our attention to a 1923 watercolor, *Ich als Indianer*, painted in a guestbook for Arthur Kaufmann (not publicly circulated), wherein Dix fashions himself as a Great Plains Native American. Perhaps these characterizations of Dix as an “Indian” explains the inclusion of the scrawled chieftain in 1920’s *Prägerstraße* as an Americanized personal insignia as well as an object of fascination in the period. Susanne Meyer-Büser, “Otto Dix: Proletarian Rebel and Big-City Dandy,” in *Otto Dix: Der Böse Blick* (London: Prestel, 2017) 30, 47. Hugo Zehder, “Otto Dix,” *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung* (September 1919) reproduced in Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism*, 65. Funkenstein, “A Man’s Place,” 182, 187.

depicted in any motion. Perhaps that sight is not for our (bourgeois) eyes. Certainly, Dix cuts a more rigid, masculine, and controlled figure than he would if he were in motion or posed as a dancer (as in August Sander's more effeminate portrait of Raoul Hausmann, Figure 58). Anne Söll intimates that Dix is himself central in this image due to his own detailed and intensive beauty regime – despite his financial hardships being visible in the state of his clothing, he committed to “keeping up appearances” through his accessories and perfume, himself assuming a modern and “feminine” kind of manliness.<sup>195</sup>

Furthermore, Susan Funkenstein suggests that this is a scene of Dix performing as a New Man through his engagement with the historically feminine spheres of dance and fashion while also carrying out a series of embodied “drags:” through his makeup and comportment, he engages directly with femininity; through his positioning in such a club scene and his fashion, he embodies the middle class (if not bourgeois) aspirations he holds; through his affiliation and affection for Jazz, he enacts a sort of “ethnic drag” as a white American man.<sup>196</sup>

The ironic title is what makes this image radical considering Weimar discourses of degeneracy and body culture: Dix troubles conventions of degeneracy precisely by conflating them with beauty. Perhaps this is also prescriptive, as the figures in this way “model” degeneracy.<sup>197</sup> Regardless, Dix signals a shift in the representations of beauty, class, and sociality while presenting the Weimar Republic as an untotizable whole. We can also understand this as a larger tendency of *Neue Sachlichkeit* portraiture: it is no

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<sup>195</sup> Anne Söll, “‘An die Schönheit’ – Selbst, Männlichkeit und Moderne in Otto Dix Selbstbildnis von 1992” in *Der schöne Körper: Mode und Kosmetik in Kunst und Gesellschaft*, edited by Annette Geiger (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 150.

<sup>196</sup> Funkenstein, “A Man’s Place,” 163-191.

<sup>197</sup> “...even the Dix figure and the drummer hold their bodies, especially their arms and torsos, in similarly awkward and angular positions, as if they, too, model the latest styles.” Funkenstein, “A Man’s Place,” 177.

longer in the aesthetic that artists are invested but, rather, its other in the form of ugliness, distortion, and other embodied constitutions of an anti-aesthetic. Additionally, the significance of the quantity of un-commissioned works rendered in oil by Dix in the early 1920s must be emphasized: many artists focused on producing less costly works in more accessible media like etchings or watercolors due to extreme inflation in the Republic.<sup>198</sup> That Dix continued to work on a relatively large scale (*An die Schönheit* is 1.4 x 1.22 meters) in oil evidently for no reason other than to make an artistic point speaks to the necessity, the potential urgency, and the compulsion that Dix possessed (or was indeed possessed by) to produce a self-portrait irreverently indignant of conventional beauty, morality, and acceptability in 1922 Dresden.

Neither Funkenstein nor Söll refer to the two male figures in the far background, one of whom is presumably a waiter. The other is barely visible but could possibly be an eerie double or skeletal “shadow” of Dix in the background, hand in pocket with a formal top hat. The “shadow” reappears in other works of Dix’s. *Gruppenbildnis*, a group portrait of Günther Franke, Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, and Karl Nierendorf (Figure 59) doubles its sitters’ faces with a dark, elongated mask (presumably African, potentially a Baule mask) next to a squatter, fair, grotesque one (perhaps a Japanese Noh mask). In *Liegende auf Leopardenfell*, (Figure 60), the “chi” composition of the painting tethers the main figure in the foreground to an animalistic “shadow,” a snarling feral dog in the background.<sup>199</sup> The *Großstadt* triptych (Figure 61) shows a raucous party scene flanked

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<sup>198</sup> Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism*, 94.

<sup>199</sup> The painting also exhibits conceptual similarities with some of Dix’s earlier etchings. The reclining woman’s animalistic physiognomy both positions her in a shared world with the wolf behind her and recalls other portraits where figures “devolve” into the animals associated with their trade. This is perhaps most notable in works like 1922’s *Dompteuse*, featuring a lion-tamer who herself appears lion-like, or 1920’s *Fleischladen*, wherein the butchers look more like their fare than people. These drawings also evoke

with panels depicting partygoers and prostitutes (including a figure dressed like a vagina) passing incapacitated war cripples in the Dresden street. In the far-left panel, a peg-legged man approaches prostitutes while standing over another veteran who lies, presumably unconscious and possibly dead, on the cobblestones. In the far-right panel, an amputee (without prosthetics) sits up against the wall, almost blending into the columns behind him as indifferent women walk by. Dix's dialectical positioning of these Weimar figures suggests the inextricable tension between them, like that found between object



**Figure 59:** Otto Dix, “*Gruppenbildnis*,” oil on panel and mounted on wood, 1923. © ARS New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

and shadow. Additionally, they represent not only different social worlds, but different gendered labors in some way united as “victims of capitalism.”<sup>200</sup> Though this is not an exhaustive list, the other most notable image of non-normate embodiments and their own normative or corrective “shadows” is in Dix’s *Kriegskrüppel (45% Erwerbsfähig)* (1920, Figure 62).

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George Grosz’s *Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse*, where military officials are rendered animal-faced, becoming donkeys, gorillas, walruses, and more.

<sup>200</sup> This 1923 work (*Dirne und Kriegsverletzter [Zwei Opfer des Kapitalismus]*) was published in the communist journal organized by Georg Grosz, Carl Einstein, and John Heartfield, *Die Pleite*. Dietrich Shubert, “*Krüppeldarstellungen im Werk von Otto Dix nach 1920: Zynismus oder Sarkasmus?*” in *Krieg und Utopie : Kunst, Literatur und Politik im Rheinland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, edited by Gertrude Cepl-Kaufmann, Gerd Krumeich, and Ulla Sommers (Essen: 2006), 293-308.





**Figure 60:** Otto Dix, “*Liegende auf Leopardenfell*,” oil on panel, 1927. © ARS New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



**Figure 61:** Otto Dix, “*Großstadt*,” distemper paint on wood, 1927-28. © ARS, NY/Erich Lessing



**Figure 62:** Otto Dix, “Kriegskrüppel (45% Erwerbsfähig),” 1920. Painting now lost.

The lost (and presumably destroyed) work was part of a series of works informally known as the “prostheses wearers” made by Dix in 1920 in response to the Kapp Putsch.<sup>201</sup> “War cripples” of varying ails (several are missing limbs with prosthetics including peg legs, hook hand, artificial eye, metal jaw, and wooden prostheses visible through the last figure’s clothes; the second figure is depicted with tremors, “*Nerven*,”

<sup>201</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 29. The Putsch coup on March 13, 1920, attempted to overthrow the republican government and replace it with an autocratic one, though it ultimately failed in part due to a massive strike of laborers organized by the USDP and the KPD. The general composition of this painting was also reproduced by Dix in 1920 in a drypoint of the same name. In addition to this work and *Die Skatspieler* of the same year, Dix's *Prägerstraße* uses a similar backdrop, presenting a complicated street scene around two war-wounded veterans. The painting establishes myriad fragmented, binary bodies occupying the same space: gendered embodiments and performances are contrasted through the storefronts of a women’s beauty salon and a prosthetics store. A desolate veteran begging for alms is opposed to a prosthetically (and socially?) mobile veteran proudly wearing his Iron Cross while wheeling over an anti-Semitic newspaper. Another well-to-do figure just out of frame with a prosthetic hand grasps a cane, a child behind the old beggar draws on the wall, and the two central prostheses wearers are flanked by dogs. That each (presumable) veteran — disenfranchised and empowered alike — shares the same cross-section of space with the child and the dogs perhaps suggests the futility of disabled bodies’ upward mobility in a normate society that conflates disability with infancy and the less than human.



and the third, in a wheel chair pushed by the fourth, also appears to be blind based on his glasses) proceed through the street, while the accoutrement of advertising signage position disembodied – but intact – appendages behind them. A pointing arm, a shoed leg, and a shadowy, transparent phrenological head model the normal limbs that the figures in the foreground are lacking while positioning the veterans as outsiders to the worlds of commerce and normate bodily science.

It is possible to read the omnipresence of the shadow in Verist works as a holdover from Expressionism (used to great effect in Expressionist films including Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet der Dr. Caligari* [1920], Arthur Robison's *Schatten – Eine nächtliche Halluzination* [1923], and F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* [1923], for example). The “shadow” as motif lends a theatrical sense of space and artificiality to the works in question, directly challenging the ideal qualities of visual culture asserted by Max Nordau.<sup>202</sup> The shadow reminds us of the irrational, the sinister, and the subjugated, but in Expressionist works and Verist paintings it carries as much weight and significance as its object. In the following case study, however, the “shadow” of society – the disabled and non-normately embodied – is more actively mobilized as leftist political metaphor than direct representation of individual nonconformity.

### **George Grosz: Disability as Political Metaphor**

One of the most avid artists of *Kriegsbeshädigter* of the Weimar period, George Grosz represents the far-left leaning faction of those associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

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<sup>202</sup> “For [Nordau], degeneracy in culture was shown by qualities such as dissonance, artificiality, agitation, strangeness, obscurity, excessive sensuality, and irrationality; while its opposite, health, was indicated by harmony, naturalness, calm, familiarity, clarity, self-control, and rationality.” Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 59.

His representations of disability are perhaps the most politically engaged of the period, but they are also the most metaphorical. Even during World War I, disability became a



**Figure 63:** Ernst Kirchner, “*Selbstbildnis als Soldat*,” oil on canvas, 1915. © Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, OH

tool in the language of bodily representation for individual anguish and deviance in Expressionist art. For example, in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s *Selbstbildnis als Soldat* (Figure 63), the artist paints himself holding up a severed right wrist. Though Kirchner sustained no physical injuries from his service as an artillery driver, he suffered a “nervous breakdown” in the same year that this painting was produced.<sup>203</sup> This somatic

representation of his state suggests that he felt nonetheless psychologically “amputated” by his

experience, though this sense of disability was not legible on his normative body. George Grosz directly extended the scope of Expressionist metaphor to the *Volkskörper*, creating incisive “portraits” of the republic’s taut social tapestry.

German disability studies scholar Carol Poore notes the *un*-reality of many interwar representations of disability, as the majority of amputees were not beggars because they were provided for by the state, and the majority of veterans did not have afflictions as severe as those often visually depicted (she notes of Dix’s 1920 *Die Skatspieler*, another painting from the “prostheses wearers” series, that men could not

<sup>203</sup> It is suspected that the resonance of Kirchner’s breakdown precipitated his suicide, albeit much later in 1938. “Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,” *Neue Galerie*, webpage.

have survived with wounds so severe).<sup>204</sup> Grosz and his more overtly political peers like Raoul Hausmann forced the Republic's instability and misplaced priorities through contrasting such "unreal" disabled bodies with bloated bourgeois ones. Raoul Hausmann's "*Prothesenwirtschaft (Gedanken eines Kapp-Offiziers)*" ("Cripple Economy: Thoughts of a Kapp Officer") in a 1920 issue of the communist publication *Die Aktion* spoofed the rehabilitation rhetoric around prostheses-wearers to critical effect. Such rhetoric aimed at returning injured veterans to the workforce and sustaining their economic productivity (and thus societal value) rather than improving their quality of life. Hausmann writes,

The cripple is a better person, which is to say that his social position has been enhanced through his service in the World War...prosthetics will never tire...thank God there are still decent blokes – and we can take notice of this for the new, big war. We make in principle, then, only two categories of soldiers: those who will be shot dead regardless, and the second category, those who will be gifted with prosthetics. With these people we can then rebuild Germany – any insightful person thus demands a cripple economy over the "soviet-style" republic of counsels.<sup>205</sup>

The war veteran is thus converted into the ideal worker who can work fifteen-hour days in spite of their own physical "deficiency." Hausmann scorns this instrumentalization and exploitation of workers for the economy to fund both the war past and the wars of the future, as well as industry's attempt to embrace the war-wounded as not idealized bodies but *productive* bodies. This satirical essay emphasizes one of the conditional ways for the war-wounded to reintegrate into society while latently distinguishing between those "capable" of rehabilitation and the inherently degenerate, whose presence necessitated amelioration. Though Hausmann (and his *Maschinenmenschen*) expressed a fascination

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<sup>204</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 30.

<sup>205</sup> Translation is my own. Raoul Hausmann, "*Prothesenwirtschaft (Gedanken eines Kapp Offiziers)*," *Die Aktion* 10 (1920), 670.

with the possibilities of the posthuman form, his interest in disability appears primarily political and somewhat superficial. Similarly, Grosz's investment in disability registers as purely metaphorical, though his works featuring non-normate bodies were important to political organizing among the left in the period.

Grosz returns to the premise of physiognomy as social heuristic but inverts it in the two portfolios *Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse* (1921) and *Im Schatten* (1920-21). *Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse* turns the practices of phrenology and physiognomy back onto the corrupt society of the young republic by showing its "face." As Barbara McCloskey notes in "The Face of Socialism: George Grosz and Jose Carlos Mariategui's *Amauta*," *Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse* was used by publisher Wieland Herzfelde at worker's meetings as part of the KPD's agitation efforts. McCloskey describes these portfolios a part of a practice of "deeply caustic art of class physiognomy" in which the bodies of different classes belie their affects and social conditions.<sup>206</sup> The motifs of Grosz's lithographs carry into his paintings, which repeat many of the same figures and concerns.

One such painting, *Grauer Tag*, was exhibited at the 1925 *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition in Mannheim as *Magistratsbeamter für Kriegsbeschädigtenfürsorge* ("Magistrate of War-Wounded Welfare," Figure 64).<sup>207</sup> The painting distills Grosz's favorite tropes into a tightly-composed scene featuring one of each type: a bureaucrat, himself scarred but otherwise intact; a war veteran missing an arm and walking with a cane; a faceless "worker ant," as Grosz referred to a group of similar figures ("*Ameisen*")

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<sup>206</sup> McCloskey, "The Face of Socialism: George Grosz and Jose Carlos Mariategui's *Amauta*," *Third Text* 22 no. 4 (July 2008), 455.

<sup>207</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 29.

in a lithograph from the 1920-21 portfolio, *Im Schatten (In the Shadows)*; and a lurking figure, potentially a right-wing politician planning another coup. The central figure in the foreground can be intuited to be the “*Magistratsbeamter*” in the original title responsible for the reparations and support to war-wounded. However, he is formally cut off from the rest of the scene, depicted as separate and disengaged from the world of the veteran behind him (as well as the worker and the conspirator). His cross-eyed countenance suggests that his is not only unaware of what is behind him, but altogether uninterested. When considered alongside aesthetic discourses of “optical truth” in the work of Franz Roh and Moholy-Nagy, perhaps this perceived visual impairment alludes to the questionable politics and motives of the *Beamter* and the administration he represents. His “vision” is altogether separated from the rest of the scene and its figures; indeed, a wall is in the process of being built (its bricks have uniform edges and do not appear as though they have been bombed out or destroyed) between this politician and the people he supposedly serves. They exist outside of his and the new republican government’s “field of vision,” which would, in its own way, lead to the government’s downfall.

The figures in the background of the painting anticipate the various forms of rebellion that would continue over the course of the Weimar Republic, fomenting the instability that would cause the tense nation to invest in the ideals put forth by Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP in the form of worker uprisings, right-wing Imperialist coups, and even mass protests of disabled veterans, many of whom would later join the NSDAP after a directorate for war victims was established in 1930.<sup>208</sup> As Poore notes of Grosz’s work,

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<sup>208</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 4-13.

In such works of art, the prosthesis – marking the juncture between technology and human flesh – became an organizing principle...Such artists interpreted prostheses critically, as symbols of the disposable nature of the human being in the militaristic, nationalistic war machine and in the mechanized, industrial capitalist system.<sup>209</sup>

*Grauer Tag* demonstrates the impotency of Weimar bureaucracy through the figures of the disabled veteran, the worker, and the scheming monarchist – though the scene (and its original title) specifically hinges on the tension derived from the republican administration’s ineffective treatment of disabled war veterans.



**Figure 64:** George Grosz, “*Grauer Tag*,” 1921, oil on canvas. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie

As demonstrated in this chapter, disability was mobilized in Verist painting of the Weimar period to various ends loosely unified in a leftist political project that found both aesthetic intrigue and critical value in non-normate bodies. These bodies constitute a veritable “shadow” of the Weimar *Volkskörper*, here made visible and foregrounded over idealized, *Körperkultur* counterparts. This conceptual resonance with Expressionism

<sup>209</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, 29.

projects into the pseudo-mimetic, anti-idealizing project of *Nach-Expressionismus*, itself a “clarifying process” that found painting’s new objectivity in the political capacity of the body and the portrait. This complex mode of representation and figuration confronts conservative painting that serves a proto-Fascist aesthetic – ironically, this is the painting tradition with which *Neue Sachlichkeit* is often erroneously conflated (as in the earlier quotes from Benjamin Buchloh). As seen in this chapter, *Neue Sachlichkeit* art attempts to contend with the whole of a fragmented society and its ails rather than seeking to repress, suppress, and correct it as in the films studied in the first chapter. This emphasis on formal, social, and psychological dissonance firmly situates the representation of non-normate bodies in *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its affiliated movements within more critically- and politically-engaged circles, although this has often been an affiliation reserved for the historical avant-garde and its abstract experiments.

## Conclusion

While Expressionist art has long occupied a primary place in early twentieth-century German art history, the equally challenging and compelling art emerging in the brief fifteen years of the Weimar Republic is comparatively underrepresented. In this thesis, I hope to address this gap by emphasizing the sheer complexity of bodily representation in Weimar visual culture from 1918 to 1933 and attempting to continue to pluralize scholarly approaches to such bodies by situating them within broader discourses of normativity, disability, and biopolitics. Rather than belabor any one group or movement, I try to demonstrate the connections and contradictions among “comorbid” interwar movements including but not limited to *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting, film, and photography; *Neues Sehen* photography and media theory; *Körperkultur* visual culture; reactionary Expressionist film; and the broader “Post-Expressionist” impulse.

In this thesis, I explore the particular yet historically-overlooked significance of the non-normate or degenerate body in German art following World War I as a political metaphor, metonymic national symbol (the relationship between the individual body, social body, and the national body or “body politic,” literalized in German as “*Volkskörper*”), and site of aesthetic and scientific debates about representation, perception, and embodiment. Through numerous case studies, I hope to challenge reigning conceptions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting as retrograde and conservative realism by situating this art and media experimentation within larger relevant discourses (aesthetic, phenomenological, social) of the body in Weimar Germany. The findings of this thesis suggest that extant art-historical and historical scholarship has often



overlooked the importance of phenomenologies and epistemologies of distortion and degeneracy to the general German Post-Expressionist project.

This thesis is by no means comprehensive and should be seen as part of a larger attempt to further “excavate” the aesthetic trends and epistemologies undergirding visual culture in the Weimar period. Though I initially wanted to deal primarily with painters affiliated with *Neue Sachlichkeit*, I soon realized that it was important to “widen the lens” and analyze non-normate bodies represented by myriad artists across multiple media from an interdisciplinary perspective.

As disability scholar Tobin Siebers reminds us, “For the Nazis, modern art provided evidence in support of the medical and eugenic rejection of disability.” Siebers argues that “the modernist interest in deformation of the human body and in new techniques of representation combined to produce visions of human appearance that demonstrated to Nazi eyes the evils of miscegenation, the devastating effects of modern life on the human nervous system, and the danger of allowing disabled people and racial inferiors to reproduce themselves.”<sup>210</sup> With this in mind, I also momentarily further broaden my scope at a few key points to reflect on the fate of “degenerate” bodies and artists under Nazi eugenics and the totalitarian regime to come (1933-1945). Throughout this thesis project, I tried to anchor my arguments with close visual analysis supported by historical and historiographical research blended with insights from critical theory and disability studies.

As discussed in the introduction and in footnotes throughout the thesis, German interwar visual culture is a particular, peculiar product of complex, centuries-long

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<sup>210</sup> Tobin Siebers, “Aesthetics of Human Disqualification,” 20-21.

intertwining of ideas, discourses, and praxes sustaining both science and aesthetics. Additional scholarship is needed to flesh out the textual and paratextual dialogues of these discourses. Further work, for example, is needed to better bridge historical research regarding nineteenth-century *Lebensreform* with turn of the century *Körperkultur* to more fully account for and compare their practices and visual cultures. Additionally, it is impossible to fully address race and (dis)ability in this period without considering earlier predecessors and traumatic legacies of eighteenth-century social degeneracy theory, nineteenth-century “race science,” and modern German genocidal eugenics. Body normativity is thus inherently eugenic and racialized even if not targeting a racialized subject.

In future research, I hope to further explore critical encounters between key theorists and artists of this period, for example analyzing two key figures in Munich in much more depth: Paul Schultze-Naumburg, whose *Kunst und Rasse* (1928) influenced the 1937 *Entartete Kunst Ausstellung* catalog design and supported critiques of modern art as socially and physically “degenerate,” and Franz Roh, whose *Nach-Expressionismus* (1925) and *Foto-Auge* (1930) publications represent some of the most cutting-edge investigations into “degenerate” visions of interwar painting and photography, respectively. In a 1930 article published in *Der Cicerone*, Roh decries how Munich’s role as a creative hotspot (or, alternatively the site of “cultural crisis” per the Nazis) had been stifled by the presence of the NSDAP headquarters.<sup>211</sup> Roh champions the sustained activity and resistance of artistic “leaders” in the city despite growing radical

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<sup>211</sup> Roh stated, “Münchens Lage bleibt klimatisch so hervorragend, seine Umgebung, derart fesselnd, dass es wirklich ein Jammer wäre, wenn vorwärtstreibendes künstlerisches Leben hier keine Zentrale mehr fände. Die kulturelle Krisis dieser Stadt gilt als überschritten. Freilich sind noch folgende Einstellungen – bei führenden Häuptern - anzutreffen, Einstellungen die gänzlich auszurotten wären.” Franz Roh, “Kunst der Gegenwart München 1930,” *Der Cicerone* (1930): 389.

conservatism. I am particularly interested in the way Munich art critics and thinkers of the body “on both sides of the aisle” dialogued during this time. I have only scratched the surface of Franz Roh’s long overlooked theory and media practice within the Weimar period. There is certainly more that could be done to further complicate our understanding of bodily aesthetics and the body politic in interwar German art and beyond.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Translated Excerpt

Franz Roh, “*Ob ein statischer Stil in unsere Zeit passe*” (“[On] Whether a Static Style is Appropriate to Our Time”), first published in *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Bierman, 1925), 70-72.

Even if one wants to work with a more blunt and short-sighted notion of “reality” which is not receptive to mere tendencies [*Tendieren*], then it must also be asked why art should even reflect this external reality. This wrong demand stems namely from the Naturalism of the nineteenth-century, from whence it has been perpetuated. In it {Naturalism} (if an abbreviated and rationalized explanation of the older Naturalism is allowed), the “Suchness” [*Sosein*, {per Husserl}] of the world -- its present, contemporary face--was not only to be mirrored so that one would really know it (“before one rebuilds it”, magical realism would add here immediately): this Suchness was deeply affirmed, yes, glorified with a certain demonic touch. If such wishless identification with the findings {of the Naturalist exploration of reality} has been receding, then other duties for art can, even have to be, implemented. Then art does not depict a real, but a possible world. Already Expressionism could be understood as the postulation of a possible world, even if it {Expressionism} still affirmed the gruesomely tense and burdensome struggle as something glorious and integrated it into its visual foundation where it {the struggle}, however in metaphysical form, reappeared. But no one can blame the newest art if it is tired of this metaphysical volcanism, if it wants to overcome the penultimate oppositions in this higher unity which cannot be grasped anymore in geological similes, but instead with astronomical ones. Thus we return to the cool calm and iron order which an “astronomical” worldview provides. [...] However, there remains a tension in Post-Expressionism. It concerns less the tension between the entities of this world {its “building” blocks - [*Blöcke*]} than the tension between the idea and the reality (composition and tracing [*Durchzeichnung*]), which are now confronted and pressed into each other more sharply than in Expressionism where reality was overshadowed by the idea. That what matters in this world is this relation of tensions is what Post-Expressionism – of course perceptually and unconsciously – wants to express with the tenderly abstract, silently dissonant, almost “inorganic” relationship that reigns between the focus on reality and the exuberant composition of its images.

*Trans. Kathryn Carney*<sup>212</sup>

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